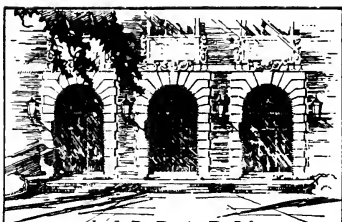


HER DIGNITY
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HER DIGNITY AND GRACE.

VOL. I.

HER DIGNITY AND GRACE.

A Tale.

BY

H. C.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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HER DIGNITY AND GRACE.

CHAPTER I.

ULSFORD.

NOT many miles from Woodnaston, where the principal events of our story took place, was Ulsford, the nearest town and chief place for business in a large district. Ulsford was a neat little market-town, as dull as any little town in the kingdom every day in the week but market-day, when it was suddenly roused up into the greatest activity and bustle; the cooks'-shops were especially busy, as they were famous for certain little meat-pies much in request, not only for the market people and farmers who frequented the market, but for such of the gentry who came there, avowedly, in many

instances, to regale themselves on these delicacies at the houses of their friends in the town. When the market was over, Ulsford relapsed into its wonted repose and neatness ; but beauty it had not. The market-place, with its centre stone cross, was a good-sized square, from which short and not very wide streets stretched away. The church and vicarage were in the principal street. The post-office, the magistrates' offices, and the small bank, with the market-hall and the best shops, were in the market-place. Some small inns were dispersed about the town—one especially noticeable in our story was the nearest to the market-place, but in a bye street, and was the most modest in appearance of them all. It was called "The Traveller's Rest," and its accommodation was in keeping with its unpretending name ; a "rest" it was, clean and wholesome, for those who required it, but they were of the humbler class, and no gentry were ever seen within its doors. It was a place of call for carriers, and did a little business of its own in that line. It was kept by one Ned Staples and his wife Sally, a homely pair who believed in the adage of "early to bed and early to rise,"

and the great advantages to be derived therefrom.

Late one evening, a few years before the commencement of this story, there arrived at this little inn, a cart—not a carrier's cart—with one old woman and many boxes and packages, on the largest of which she was seated. The carter got down from his cart, and after the usual greetings with Ned Staples and his wife, said he had brought an old body who was a traveller, and wanted a quiet lodging for a day or two; could they take her in? Yes, there was room for her, but what were they to do with all those packages? The innkeeper said he would go and have a look at her; the carter said he was sure she was respectable but poor; he had not spoken to her much for she was sad, and he was sorry for her. Except to ask a few questions, she had not opened her lips the whole day, and save a bit of something she had with her, had tasted nothing. To shorten the way, they had come by cross-roads from the place he brought her from, Thorpeford, and she didn't seem to know a creature. She had staid at that town one night, he heard, but he didn't

know where she came from before that, nor her name.

All this was told to the innkeeper whilst his wife was attending to the old woman, whom she put into the best room, and invited her down to have some supper in the tap-room which had no other occupant but the carter who brought her.

The poor old woman was starved with cold, and tired and bruised by the shaking of the cart. Sally Staples, the innkeeper's wife, got her a cordial, which, with some good food, soon restored a little animation, but she continued silent and sad, and was glad to go to her room. She looked so poorly in health that Sally wished to assist her, but she declared she wanted no help, and sleep would soon restore her.

The carter told them the old woman was careful of her packages, though he believed they were nothing but a pack of old things not worth the carriage; and "some books," she said, which were heavy; and recommended the innkeeper to put them away safely for her, "for she holds great store by 'em though they be so poor," he said.

The old woman puzzled the innkeeper and his wife by her silence and sadness. Sally tried every possible means to worm something from her, but to no purpose. She was a kindly soul and pitied her, took her into her own little room behind the bar, where she had her meals with the innkeeper and his wife, and took every pains to please her, always hoping for a little information about herself in return. But no; scarcely a word beyond a monosyllable could be got from her. She sat silent and melancholy in a corner, busy at some small piece of needlework; the people who came in to chat on the market-day went on with their gossip not heeding her, nor noticing that she watched them.

Ned Stapes was specially interested about her; "tears allays conquered him," as his wife said, and he owned that he could not do enough to aid a woman who was sorrowful. His wife, on the contrary, reserved her sympathy till "she knew the reason why," for, as she further asserted, "it's easy enough to put on tears." So she set to work to watch her narrowly, and try to find out by her manners and ways, as she could not from her lips, what her antecedents had been,

having made a shrewd guess that she was not altogether what she appeared to be.

The good folks liked to know who came to their inn, it was but natural they should ; and they were the more curious when there was reticence on the part of the traveller ; that was but natural also. In that case they might suspect some evil had the mystery been concerning a man ; but with this old woman, who was only sick and sorrowful, no such suspicions could arise. Yet her “ways,” as they said, were so strangely out of keeping with her garb and with those of their general customers that they were more and more puzzled to think how that could be. They never had had one who carried about so much old rubbish—they in general had no baggage ; nor had they ever had one with so many “fads.”

One night when Sally and her husband were retiring to rest, they were talking over their customers according to their habit, the old woman being now the subject ; and, said Sally :

“The old dame has owned she has been in good houses.”

“Well, I b’lieve her there ; she’s seen a more

nor we think on, you may be sartain," he replied.

"To be sure, Ned," said his wife, "and she's no fool to keep it all to hersel' neither. But, lors, Ned, any one can see she's used to good things. See at dinner or supper how she'll speer on the knives and forks, to see if they're clean ; t'other day she set 'em aside. ' Is anything amiss, ma'am ? ' says I ; says she, ' they'd be the better washed in hot water,' says she. So I did it for her, and she smiled and looked so pleased. I allays takes care she shall have 'em as she likes, ever since, and it keeps 'em fresh I do b'lieve, Ned. Then she takes her knife and fork so delicate like, not like the like's o' we, and she picks and picks about her meat, be it ever so good, and I'm blessed if it beant as fresh and sweet as possible."

"Why bless me, Sal, how thee do watch a body ; I never see'd a woman like thee for gumshon."

"Gumshon, Ned ? we need have that to be in our place. I tell'ee what, too, Ned, she's never been brought up to hard work nither, with them tittivating fingers of harn. She'd hardly be fit

to lift a big kettle off the fire. She's more like a leddy nor that."

"Like a leddy, Sal? Why I tell'ee if she'd been born a leddy, she'd do to be a queen."

"Lors, Ned, how you do talk to be sure! Like a leddy? Why, what'll ye say next? There's a long lane 'twixt her and a leddy, let alone a queen. Why, Ned, you're quite doited about her; ye'll be saying I'm like a queen next."

"Nay, Sally, nay. I shouldn't a courted thee, if so be thee wur a leddy. Thee's a right good body, and a precious good wife, old girl, but thee'll never be like a leddy, nor a queen. Now don't look so turned off like, at my saying of it; thee never will, I do assure thee. So, old girl, give us a kiss and a done with it."

"You're mighty foine, Ned, but I'll no kiss ye till ye give me that new kirtle ye promised me long ago."

"Heck, Sally! So thee can't forget that! A woman's made up of kirtles and flaunts, and she can't think o' nothin' else from the time she can prattle till her dying hour. Aye, thee shall

have the kirtle and welcome, Sally, if so be it's only for thy good care o' the old dame."

"The old dame! ye think of nothin' else, Ned."

"Aye, I do think on her, all the time I am a rubbin' down the 'osses; and when I was a feeding o' the pigs, as yesterday evening, I well nigh let the old sow eat the whole troughful to hersel', a thinking that the puir old dame must ha' fell out of her spere like to be so low as she. Even if she'd a been a housekeeper in a grand house, it 'ud be better to a kep' to that, nor fiddle-faddle about the world with mincing footsteps as she do in they clogs o' harn, right afeard o' getting a speck o' mud on her."

"Then I s'pose, Ned, it wor you that set the young 'uns a grunting, as I remember, afore supper; a grunting enough to grunt their hearts out, for want of their meat. And I went and danged at Chucky, the swine-herd, right about for it, and clapped his ears for telling a lie, when he said he didn't."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Ned Staples. "So ye clapped his ears, did ye? Are ye goin' to clap my ears now? Don't look so fierce-like, Sally,

old girl ; but be kind to the old dame allays as ye have been, there's a good wench. Ye'll have your gain, for I'll give thee all thy flaunts."

" Ah, you've a soft heart, Ned. The parson said 'twas in the right place, t'other day. How does he know what's the right place?—but if he'd said it was soft and good, I should a believed him. And, Ned," she said, putting her arms round his neck, " I'd like some blue ribbons with the kirtle. And ye be sure to mind that Mr. Sharp's is the best shop to buy them things ; all the gentlefolks goes to him."

" Thee'll tell me that to-morrow, Sal ; I'm right down sleepy now."

CHAPTER II.

WOODNASTON.

THE estate of Woodnaston comprised not only the park belonging to Mr. Askham, and his favourite residence, but the whole parish and village of that name, the latter being situated quite close to the park gates, between those called the south and the east gates. It was a very pretty little village, neat and compact; Mr. Askham took infinite pains to have it kept clean and picturesque, and the "greatest sin" (as the villagers said) was to let anything go uncared for, or out of repair. There were seldom any new comers; all the inhabitants had been more or less in the service of the Askham family, or the families of the neighbouring gentry, for generations; the same names kept the same cottages; when the population increased, new cottages were built in much the same style as the rest. All were thatched; some were brick; others, and more often, wood and brick with

white plaster between the wood, in the old black-and-white style, with gables. Many were covered with ivy like the old church and parsonage; others, with more pretension to horticulture, were ornamented with trained clematis and monthly roses. They had all good gardens to the back, with a small patch for flowers inside wooden railings to the front. As a matter of course, the villagers were not all equally inclined to keep their premises as neat "as the Squire," as he was called, wished, but for the most part he was well pleased with them, and they with him, for he was kind and benevolent, and a most just man; on the latter virtue they most implicitly relied.

The first and most genial inhabitant of the village was the rector, Mr. Dale, "ta parson," as the villagers called him. He was a man of good private fortune besides his rich living—one of the best in the kingdom—and was famed all round the country for his hospitality and benevolence. He was a "hunting parson" too, and kept a small pack of beagles, "just to keep me in good spirits and exercise," he said; he knew every one in his extensive parish, and many

beyond it for miles round, where his hunting excursions took him, and was on friendly terms with them.

Then there was the doctor, Mr. Vyal, a man of rather eccentric character, who either rode about the country on a rough pony, with huge saddle-bags, and a valise attached to the crupper of his saddle, or drove a small spring-cart, a match for his pony, both being equally suited to the roughness of the roads across heaths, and over hill and dale. He was a sportsman in his way, and had generally his dogs and gun with him. His homely wife acted as his assistant in "the surgery" in his absence.

The village inn, "the King's Head," was the usual centre of gossip. And lastly, as a place of note, there was the post-office, of smallest amount of business.

Without an exception they were all tenants of Mr. Askham; the living was in his gift, and the then occupant was a distant relation of Mr. Askham's, the Rev. Alan Dale, whom we mentioned before, a Yorkshireman, who prided himself on being a lineal descendant of the once famous Alan-a-Dale, the companion of

Robin Hood — or Robin-of-the-wood, more properly.

The most picturesque entrance to the village was at the east end of the long avenue of elms, which reached far beyond the east lodge of the park. The wheelwright, who was also the carpenter, lived there, and his yard, with its careless grouping of old carts and wheels, added much to the beauty of the scene; and the “harmonious blacksmith” was his next door neighbour. The fine old trees nearly met over the road, giving a most delightful shade in summer. It was, in fact, a treble avenue, for the trees over the park palings made an avenue of the footpath, and on the other side of the road was another row of elms, with a wide grass path. The further and west end of the village street was not so attractive in appearance; it opened on the rising slope of a large common, on which stood a small solitary cottage. From it there was a most extensive view. It had always been considered by the villagers there was some spell upon this cottage. It was “no cannie,” they said, and but few would venture near it after dark.

The park paling retreated from the centre of the village up to the south lodge, the remaining lodge being to the north of the park. A belt of wood, with a wide green drive, ran on the north, east, and south sides of the park; on the west there was merely a gate, without a lodge, which led into a wooded enclosure, walled in by a low stone wall on the park side, a public path going through the enclosure. There were woods, and heath, and arable lands, on the north side, beyond the park palings, and the park itself was finely wooded. An avenue from the south lodge led to the substantial, plainly-built mansion, with lawns and gardens around it. This was the principal lodge, and nearest to the village. The other two were in the belt, and were private entrances; the west gate was merely an outlet to the woods, there being a public footpath from the village through it and the adjacent woods to the quarries beyond.

The park lay so sheltered by the hills to the north and east, that there were few places in the county more desirable as a residence.

As a matter of course, the village had its schools. With the exception of Mr. Askham's

school for boys, they were the old-fashioned and excellent "dames' schools," where the girls and little boys received their little learning.

The elder and most advanced boys in Mr. Askham's school were made monitors over the others. This was not an enviable position ; it had not long been the rule of the school ; it was not pleasing to them to be ruled by their school-fellows, and led to strife, where before all was peace. Thus, these monitors were not always popular with the other lads ; they were far more strict and exacting than John Rule, the master, and overlooked nothing. Children of both sexes are great sticklers for justice ; and so long as they were fairly dealt by, the boys put up with the domineering of the monitors, but any unfairness was sure to be summarily dealt with when school was over, though they had to submit, with a bad grace, during school hours. Many a black eye told of the resentment shown out of school ; and on one occasion, the enmity against one monitor, the cleverest boy in the school, but whose truthfulness the other boys said was not to be depended upon, grew to such a height that an open rebellion seemed imminent, and

Mr. Askham was sought by the majority of the boys, and appealed to for justice. He told them he would not hear a one-sided complaint, but when all the boys were assembled in the schoolroom, the said monitor, William Meres, and the schoolmaster included, he would hear what they had to say.

The boys promised to be all assembled as he desired, in the course of an hour, and "William Meres was so certain he was right that he'd be sure to come." They had reckoned, however, without knowledge of his character, for as soon as he heard that Mr. Askham was going to inquire into his conduct he hid himself; but although assisted by his mother, he was eventually caught and brought into the schoolroom, after keeping Mr. Askham waiting some minutes.

William Meres was a good-looking boy, strongly and compactly made. Everything he did he did well. He was first as a bowler in the cricket-field; a very fair hand at quoits; a pretty good shot for his age, as he proved when he went out with his father, who was one of the gamekeepers; but for running or leaping, or any

sport that required agility, he was not fitted, and it was the jealousy inspired by this failing at some recent games, that chiefly led to the present outbreak. He determined to take his revenge in the schoolroom, and the offenders, two agile youths, were without sufficient cause turned back to work their way up again to their late places in their class.

On investigating the subject his want of truth and justice was clearly proved. Mr. Askham gave him a severe reprimand, with threatened punishment, if anything of the sort occurred again ; upon which the delinquent said, addressing Mr. Askham :

“ Please, sir, I hope you won’t be angry, but I should like to leave school, though I should not like to be sent away ; I think I have done my learning now.”

“ What is the cause of this sudden thought ? ” said Mr. Askham.

“ It is no sudden thought, sir ; I’ve thought of it a long time.”

“ What would you mean to do then ?—have you made up your mind as to your future career in life ? ”

“ Yes, sir ; I want to be a soldier. I want to go to the wars we hear of.”

Here there was a general murmur amongst the boys, who sat with staring eyes and open mouths in expectation of what was coming next.

“ Well,” said Mr. Askham, “ what do your father and mother say?—would they like it? You are very young to enlist.”

“ Father, sir, doesn’t say much, but mother cries, and it’s enough to make me cry too to see her ; for I must go ; I’m bound to go ; I can’t stay at home ; I must go and do some of the shooting. Oh, sir,” he continued, in a very excited way, “ I’m very sorry if I have offended you or done wrong about the boys ; but pray do help me, sir, to be a soldier, or I shall go along, I know I shall, with the first soldier man that comes round.”

“ If you are so determined I will see what can be done for you ; it will not be difficult to get you into a marching regiment ; but remember, Meres, fair play is required everywhere, and truthfulness above all, whether in the army or out of it ; and you must try and correct that

spirit of jealousy and revenge which is so strong in you."

"Thank you, sir. If you will only get me into a regiment I will do all you say."

"And me too, and me too," shouted a number of voices, for the idea of "fighting Boney" was the first amongst the youths at that time.

The assembly then broke up, and the former culprit was a hero for the time being; his enemies of fifteen minutes ago were now his devoted admirers, and ran about shouting, "Bill Meres is going to be a soldier; he is going to the wars to fight old Boney—Hoorah! hoorah! hoorah! God save the king," &c., to their great gratification.

His new character of hero lasted for some days; even his mother was startled, by the suddenness of the news, into enthusiasm.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAVELLERS.

FROM a quiet homestead, near Hebden Bridge, there came a cavalcade.

A tall man of past sixty years of age riding first on a good hackney; then a string of nine pack-horses, the leader with a collar of bells, attended by the old man's son, a tall young man of light complexion, who also rode, and by five others, servants, each of whom either led or walked beside a horse, down the steep narrow horse-path that led down into the valley of Todmorden, in Yorkshire, a picturesque but broken road.

There had been some heavy rain, and the small brook that fell down the side of the steep horse-path in cascades, was swollen to a noisy foam-covered stream—"a great swash," in the dialect of the country—rushing with precipitous force over the rocks, and discomfiting the ivy and brambles which hung in wreaths at the sides.

It was a lovely morning at the end of April, unusually warm and balmy for the time of year, and the little train were all, including the horses, quite inspirited, evidently enjoying the weather, the scene, and the early morning sunbeams that darted down the valley, which though winding a little, runs nearly due east and west. It was barely six o'clock; all the people were astir, many hurrying to the manufactories, then worked by water-power, spinning with the mule machinery which had almost entirely superseded the first ingenious invention of spinning-jennies.

They travelled along through the valley and town in a westerly direction, having a good word or a jest with their neighbours as they passed. The merry jingle of the packhorse bells sounded pleasantly in the calm morning air, as the horses slowly came along, for they were heavily laden and did not go out of a walk, for the old man remembered the adage, "the good man is merciful to his beast," and invariably acted upon it. The horses knew their masters, and there existed a confidence and fellowship between them that greatly added to the comfort of both, and lessened the trouble of their management.

They had not proceeded far when a lad came running breathless to them saying, as well as his beating heart would allow him :

“Hey ! Faither. Stop !”

“Hey, Jooas ! what’s to do, lad ?” cried the old man before the lad could say more.

“Faither, moother says, please not to forget ta new harness when ye get to ta graat toon. And ta red cloth for ta cloock and kirtle.”

“Aye, the femmels never forget their gear,” he said laughing.

“And, Eam,” said the lad to his brother, “mind to heat this fettled ale for faither, moother says, when it comes chil o’ nights ;” and he gave him a stone jar. “Ye maun pit it in ta maund, so it be little shaken.”

“Ye don’t ca’ your shakin’ nothin’ then,” said Eam.

“Fettled ale !” said the old man, laughing ; “yer moother allays fears I be clemmed ; good soul ! Tell yer moother,” he continued, “I’ll be thinking o’ her duds and Abie’s too. And, Jooas, ye mind the mare and colt ; take ’em in o’ chil nights. God bless ye, lad ; rin whoam.”

Farther on he stopped to speak to a man on

the road, but the train continued its route ; when he overtook them he said to his son :

“ Eam, didn’t ye pay that chap for the earn ? ”

“ Aye, faither ; but we owe him for grinding the meaal. Moother ’ll see to that.”

“ Puir chap ! ye soold ha’ told me that, there’ll be but little owing then.”

“ Did he ax for his mooney ? ”

“ Nay ; but he looked so worn and sick, and says his missis is down bad and can’t get about, and he’s hard pressed with the bairns who greet sore ; and there’s little comin’ in, for he can’t sit to his loom as he did ; so he was going to Maester Warden’s factory to see if they could give him a job, ’twould be mooney quicker got ; his mill doesn’t pay him much at this season.”

“ Well, faither, what says you ? ”

The old man listened but said nothing ; then after a pause, Eam continued :

“ I says he gets into good hands if so be he gets to Maester Warden’s ; he’ll never starve no more, and have a doctor to look after he ; and if so be he’s good at his work, he’ll get on. Rale good measters they be, and as to the leddy,

she's somewhat sharp in her tongue, she can't have no answers to her say, but she's rale good-hearted and kind in the main."

"Aye; her bark's worse nor her bite, as the sayins go," said his father.

"An' they be rale staunch folk too."

They journeyed on over hill and dale, by the pack-horse tracks and bridle-paths to Wakefield, "ta graat toon" as compared with Todmorden. Thence through a part of Westmoreland and Cumberland, stopping at their various places of call of several generations standing, for the name of Greenwood of Hebden Bridge and Todmorden was well-known for its good, well-made stuffs. This spring their journey was to be longer than usual in consequence of a considerable order from Whitehaven, whither they were hastening. The younger Greenwood fell ill by the way after leaving Wakefield, and they left him at a cottage to be taken care of till their return. The poor fellow was quite light-headed, and shivered with ague when he was carried into the peat-digger's cottage on the border of the moor. His father saw him comfortably lodged, and left money for his sustenance; on his return

he called to see his son, who was improved in health, but not fit to travel. The woman at the cottage said he was as gentle as a baby; even in his delirium he was easily soothed with a kind word and a smile. She declared he was "that good and kindly like" she quite loved him; she should be sorry to part with him, and so would her sister who was there to help her, and as to her "mon," he wanted to keep him "for aie."

The father said he would come or send by a carrier to fetch him when he was well enough to travel, and gave her more money that he might want for nothing. He did not know what his mother would say when he went home without him, for though he was not their only child, he was the favourite with them all; they would be right dull without him; he cheered them all with his merry ways. And for the cows and horses, they'd miss him rarely too; he was so gentle with them, they'd follow him about anywhere; he was sure the pack-horses missed him when he was left at the cottage, for they "fell to a 'nickerring' for all the world as if they wanted him to come along;" he was "that good

he didn't think he could hurt a fly." The old man broke down in his eulogium on his son, and the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Keep heart, measter, keep heart," said the woman; "he'll get on well, he's got the cheery spirit that keeps people back from harm—anyways, so far as please God," she said in a softer tone.

CHAPTER IV.

WILL STOKES.

BEYOND the heath to the north side of Woodnaston Park, but still on the outskirts of one of Mr. Askham's woods, at a place called Ashencroft gate, lived William Stokes and his wife Mary, as handsome a couple as one would wish to see. He was under-shepherd on the estate, and having a wide range of duty, his hours of coming and going from home were often very uncertain.

He had been married five years to an industrious girl from Northumberland, and with their two children were apparently happy and contented: good wages, a cottage, and a piece of good garden ground, they had all they required; and, above all, the best of masters—firm, just, and considerate. They were fully aware of their good fortune, and all went smoothly on, till a short time before our story commences. Mary's genial countenance as she went through her daily work

lent a charm to the scene, and sitting at her spinning-wheel, when all the house-work was over, with her little children playing round her, either at the cottage-door or by the peat fire, the comely young mother looked the picture of content.

She, like all the women in those days, especially in the North, had learned to spin from her earliest childhood, and became an adept at her wheel, whether for flax or wool. She had no near neighbours at Ashencroft to bear her company at spinning-time, as she had had in her former village-home, where groups of women and girls were to be seen sitting at their wheels, spinning and chatting outside their doors—tongues, feet, and fingers vying with each other as to which could go the fastest, and so well accustomed to the work that they seemed to spin mechanically, and to make good yarn without its needing their attention. How well clothed they were too, in their *really* homespun apparel; so well made, warm, and comfortable, likely to last an indefinite length of time; good to the last rag; no “shoddy,” no adulterated linen or wool “faced” over to make that look good which was

not. No warp of one quality and woof of another, causing the material to be rotten. No ; in the days of home manufactures all was substantial, worth wearing, and the trouble of making, though the general aspect might not be of the fineness of modern machine-made fabrics. Little did the people know, in the days of the riots, how much right they had on their side, when they opposed the introduction of machinery-loom and spinning. They thought only of the loss of the little *money* they earned at their wheels and hand-loom ; they could not anticipate the irreparable loss it would be to their independence and personal comfort. As to the cost, how little the wool and flax cost at the outset ! the trouble—it was a perpetual source of enjoyment, with profit in the end.

But to return to Will Stokes and Mary. He was madly fond of all sorts of field sports ; hunting (on foot), shooting, trapping ; he had invented springes and gins that were ingeniously contrived ; whistles and calls he made neatly ; nets, snares, everything connected with catching animals or birds, he made a study. He would have been a better gamekeeper than shepherd ;

but he was in fact a poacher by nature and inclination. No doubt he might have been employed under the gamekeeper if he had so wished, but there was a disposition towards concealment and adventure in all his acts which was not in accordance with it. His wife, when this failing became prominent, was constantly taken by surprise at the discovery of hidden things—dogs of suspicious appearance concealed in the outhouse ; two new guns in place of his old one, with baskets and packages concealed in the cupboard ; and when she asked about them, she got for answer : “ Never mind, lass ; they don’t concern thee.” Men whom she knew to be poachers came to the cottage asking for him, and if he happened to be there, took him away with them, sometimes not to return till the next day. ¶

In the mean time the head shepherd would send for him ; he was shirking his work ; or the shepherd would come himself. Mary could not hide from him that her husband was not at home, and she knew not where he was gone ; but she never would say who he was gone with, she would keep that secret if she could. The shepherd said if Will Stokes would not do his work he

must have another who would, and frightened poor Mary, who stood trembling.

When her husband was gone on his secret expeditions, her spirit seemed to have gone too. She was quite unnerved. What should she do? What would become of them? She knew the truth must at last be found out. How wrong to deceive their master, who was so good to them! She knew some angry words had passed between Mr. Askham and Will. She had never seen her master angry before; and Will afterwards had come into the cottage in a great rage muttering to himself, and would not be pacified. "He couldn't 'bide it," he said; "some one should pay for it." "His master had said he was a poacher, and then that a poacher was no better nor a thief." "He couldn't 'bide it." "Some one should pay for it," he said. She made no remark, but as his former associates kept aloof from the cottage, she hoped and believed they were "to pay for it," and therefore kept away.

Matters did not mend; she got worried and anxious at Will's more frequent absences. She entreated him to be regular at his work; he

soothed her with soft words and caresses. She believed him and was happier; but still the course of his conduct did not materially mend, and she would be happy one day, and full of care the next.

CHAPTER V.

FARMER GILES'S GOSSIP.

“WELL, sir, I’ll look round ’em as I go that way,” said Farmer Giles to his landlord, Squire Askham of Woodnaston.

“I wish you would, for the sheep do not look as well as they did in poor old Fleace’s time.”

“Wade’s called a good shepherd too, sir, though he don’t know this country I do b’lieve. He keeps ’em too long on the low land, sir; he should take ’em up to the fells before this. But Will Stokes, who’s on the hills from a lad, and wur under old Fleace, here, should know that, and he do know, for he’s as good a shepherd as any round the country.”

“I fear he is apt to neglect his work, and has got into bad company.”

“May be, sir; I’ve had my doubts about ’un, for his wife looks sad and weary-like. She was a winsome lass when he brought her home.”

“She was indeed,” said the Squire.

“What’s this we hear, sir, about them wars? More killed, and more killed, and the battles got such outlandish names I can’t turn my tongue to speak ’em. My wife sits and cries when I read about ’em in the ‘Weekly Courant.’ Ah, sir, that’s a wonderful newspaper! I can’t tell how it can tell of such things; and so wonderful quick too in comin’ here. Why it’s wrote on it, ‘Published by Charles Cocks at the Poultry, London, Saturday, May 20.’ My brother Joe, he lives in London town, and he buys it, and we go shares in it; he likes to have a readin’ o’ Sundays, so does I, so he sends it to me the Friday follerin’, an’ I gets it as soon as may be. Last Saturday it wur June 5th, but a fortnight since it be published out; it be wonderful quick.”

“Yes, the mail is much increased in speed. It takes but three days now from London to York; and owing to the roads being hard this summer time, communication is more speedy about here also. When the war is over and there is time to improve the roads, we may have the mails nearly as fast in the winter as well. You will remember how sadly we were behind time the

last bad winter—more than six weeks without either mails, letters, newspapers, or travellers.”

“Aye, sir,” said the farmer, shaking his head, “that was a time! And to think of the sheep as was lost in the snow, and all the poor people out o’ work—froze out—and poor old ‘Mother Pendle’ too, she wur buried in the snow. Poor old soul, she was a good body! Ah! and how they good-for-nothin’ fellers shouted, and roistered, and hooted, it wur shameful, when she could na’ be found; and said they wur certain sure then that she wur a witch, and carried off by the devil. If you mind, sir, there was thunder and lightnin’ too, and they swore it was she that made it as the devil took’d her away. Well, if she wur a witch or a devil I wish there’d be many of ’em, for she wur a rare good soul, and honest as the sun, for he never says he don’t shine when he do, though she did turn round ‘and swear and shake her stick,’ as they boys said, when they hooted at her.”

“I do not believe she swore at them,” said the squire, “nor can I understand why she got the name of a witch, for she never harmed any one that I heard of.”

“ Well, sir, you see, they urchins will do anything to plague a puir body. They speered at her through the window till she smeared it over wi’ pipeclay ; then the boys cried out that she roasted hedgehogs alive, and wouldn’t let ’em see what she was about ; that’s, they said, why she whitened her window. So her chimney caught fire one day ; it was out o’ school-hours, so they all ran to see, and shouted that she was roasting little Betty Pickles which went up with a message ; so they broke the puir old crone’s windows, calling her more of a witch nor ever, and all sorts of bad names, and little Betty comes to the window and cries out as loud as she could, ‘ Shame on ye, boys, shame.’ Then they got madder than ever, and said the old witch had tried, but the devil and she together wur not strong enough to burn the child. Well, sir, by that time the fire had burnt itself out ; the old woman never tried to put it out, for in her knowing ways, she knew,” he said, laughing and jerking his head, “ it would clean the chimley better than ’ere a sweep, and it wur a good hut of brick and tile, so it wouldn’t be burnt ; so she went out by the biggin at the

back with her crutch stick and heavy wooden clogs on, and the first lad she caught, didn't she set him right on end! Ha, ha, ha! till he howled and cried mercy, and all the others ran away, a pack of cowards!" and the farmer laughed loud at their cowardice. "So, sir," he resumed, "finding she had a mighty strong stick and could use it, they've contented themselves wi' calling her foul names and a witch ever since. You heerd say, p'raps, sir, what a clanging and clinking they made 'to lay her ghost,' as they said, when she was found, puir old bodie, buried in the snow? There wasn't an old key or a pan, brass or iron, they could catch hold on that wasn't had out to make the noise louder; and they would have done the same at the funeral but ta parson, God bless him! looked sharp to forbid it."

"Poor old woman, she was very harmless. I have often heard of her truly charitable acts."

"Aye, sir, they wur true charity, for she had but little of her own, but that little wus for any one poorer. And as for childer! if she found one wandering late on the common, she'd take it to her whoam and feed it and warm it by her

peat fire, and dry its clo'es if they be wet, and then lead it near its own mother's, but not far in the village, because o' they boys. I do believe—— Hulloo! what's thee after there wi' they calves?" cried he to a boy who was chasing some calves in the garden. "Heigh there! You maun excuse me for a minute, sir," he said, as he ran off; and his wife, who came to fetch him, came up to Mr. Askham, and with a curtesy asked him, "if he'd please to walk into the parlour?" He declined, saying, after a few minutes' chat with her, he was going to the Holt (the next farm), and he wished her good morning.

She watched him along the lane till he got to the high road; and then went to assist in catching the calves which were making sad havoc in the garden, breaking the cabbages, and treading down the young potatoes.

"Have a care there; have a care; don't hunt 'em so fierce. Don't ye see they'll knock over the bees and be stung to death? Drat the boy! what are ye thinking on?—come away, come away I say."

The boy at last did as he was bid, and the

calves, left to themselves, one after the other quietly trotted out of the open gate into the field.

“Thee has no more sense nor a stick,” the farmer said when he got up to the boy. “I should like to give thee a good hiding. Now ye’ll have to fettle up the garden agen. Shut the gate, can’t ye?—we shall have ’em in agen ; when they’ve once tasted greens, they’re sure to come back for more.”

Farmer Giles had locked out the calves by the time his wife got up to him, and they walked towards the house together.

“The squire be looking uncommon well,” said Sally Giles to her husband.

“Yes, he be. It’s a good thing he’s here and not in them wars ; they hadn’t gone at it so furious when ta old squire died, and he had to come here. Poor master Roger ! he’d a been better here too ; he wus about the first we heerd on that wus killed in the wars, of our people.”

“Ah, a fine young gentleman he was too. But two year younger than our squire. In looks though, they wus not much like brothers ; this one, fair and so free ; master Roger, with his

dark eyes, so silent. They wus both wild to be sogers and go to the wars, and master Frank takes after 'em. I heerd his ma' say, he sits on the end of the sofy astride, and hacks the cushions with his wooden sword, saying, he'll kill old Boney."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the farmer, "though 'twould be a good thing for Boney to be locked up, he does a deal of mischief."

"Ah! they say he's killed all his own people, and he's obliged to fight to get more sogers. Sure some people be wicked."

"Why he should be allowed to go on killing people passes my 'standing, as ta parson says."

"He'll have a deal ta answer for. I wouldn't be in his shoes."

"No fear, old 'ooman. You're not much given to fight, are ye, Sally?"

As they went into the house, he said to his wife: "Come, missis, I mustn't loiter; I maun get to the market though it's latish. I maun see what's on at the sales."

In a short time he was on "Dobbin," jogging along the lane, when he met Mr. Askham. "There was no one at the Holt, I suppose, sir?"

“No, they were gone to market.”

“Can I do a stroke o’ business for ye, sir?”

“No, Giles, thank you; but bring me back any news you may hear about the war.”

“That I’ll be sure to do, sir. Good-day.”

Mr. Askham got over the stile on his way down the fells towards Woodnaston, and was soon out of sight. After he had gone some little distance he turned, and took another path.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FALLING TREE.

THE same morning, after Mr. Askham had parted from farmer Giles, he was standing by his woodmen, who were felling a young oak in the west copse, which had been struck by lightning the previous autumn, and much shattered; it had also other dead branches which made it unsightly and not likely to flourish again.

He stood at a little distance with his back to the tree, and after a few words to the men, seemed in an unusually meditative state of mind. They begged him to move as the tree was about to fall, for although he was not very near they thought it would be prudent for him to move still further away. It was of no avail; they called to him, but he did not even look up; there he stood firm and erect, with the thumb of his left hand in a button hole of his waistcoat, and tracing innumerable zigzags in the dust with the small stick he held in his right

hand. The men noticed he was more pale than usual and seemed tired, though it was early, being not yet noon-day.

They could not leave their places, but continued to call to him, "Please, sir, move away, she'll be down in a minute;" and immediately, with a crash and a dull thud upon the ground, the tree fell—and with it, Mr. Askham!

"Where's the squire?" shouted the men.

"By gor! he's killed," said one; and they ran to help him. There he lay on his right side and groaned; his eyes were shut, his face was ashy pale, and bore an expression of agony that quite altered him, and made him look aged by ten years. They were deeply grieved to see their beloved young master, as they thought, in the agonies of death. One said he would run for the doctor; another ran off to the hall to give the alarm, and to fetch a carriage; whilst the two others remained to assist him. As gently as they could they tried to move him from under the branches, but he gave a piercing scream when his left arm was touched, and seemed to go off in a faint. After a short time he rallied a little. He moved his head, but his

eyes were still closed, and if they touched him he said "no, no," so they stood by and watched him; every minute seemed an hour, as they anxiously awaited the arrival of the doctor or the carriage, or both. Mr. Askham lay quietly there, groaning occasionally, but giving no other signs of life. Near an hour passed in this way, for the men had upwards of a mile to run for succour.

At last one of the villagers came by the footpath through the fields and coppice, partly the same way Mr. Askham had come to the wood an hour or so before. Coming up, he said, "Hey-day! what's this?" The men told him what had happened to the squire in spite of all their warnings.

Mr. Askham raised himself to an almost sitting posture and listened to the men. The villager after hearing the account of the accident said: "Well, this be the second bad job to-day; for there's a man found dead in the Fell meadow, and they say it be Will Stokes, but I haven't seed him myself."

"Dead! dead!" cried Mr. Askham, looking wildly and getting up suddenly, yet ready to

sink again but for the timely aid of the men, and groaning when he was touched. "Dead! who's dead?" he said again, looking round more wildly still, as if suddenly awoke from a bad dream.

"Will Stokes, they say, sir," said the villager. "Howsumdever they've caught the murderer, they say, and have got 'un safe."

"Will Stokes! Caught the murderer!" cried Mr. Askham in broken sentences. "Who is it—what is it—where—when was it"—Then he sank down again almost fainting, and although he gave a piercing cry on being touched, they lifted him to a better place.

"Not much more nor an hour ago, sir," answered the villager. But the woodmen said to him in a low tone, "Don't say any more, it troubles the master, and he don't understand yer; he's amost dazed, d'ye see, by the fall."

They had gently laid Mr. Askham down on the grass. His eyes were shut, and except for the nervous twitchings of his body and his low groans, he might be taken for a corpse, so ghastly pale did he look.

The three men stood aside talking in whispers.

"I should na thought the squire ha' been so naish," said one.

"Hey! but he'd a mighty fall," said another.

"Should na wonder it kill 'un, or may be he never recover it. He'd a mighty shakin', and p'raps he's bones be broke."

"Did ye see him fall?" asked the villager.

"Noa; no 'un see him fall. We was all busy with the tree like, but we shouted to 'un, and he would na move; he was a thinkin' like, and as ta minister said t'other day, 'lost in thought.'"

"Hey! them was powerful words ta parson said."

"My lady will take on when she hears 'un! They be mighty kind like, as young turtle-doves."

"What be it about Will Stokes? How was he killed? It 'ud take a strong man to kill he."

"I dinno'. I haven't seed 'un. I heerd say it in the village as I cum away. They say his blood and brains is all about the road and he terrible cut about; he's clo'es all torn to rags."

"Some of he's poacher fellers p'raps, set on 'un; a quarrel like, for Will be mighty hot-tempered. Well, I all'ays told 'un he'd come to

some harm along a they 'legal fellers. 'Them as goes agin the law, may fall by it!' as they say."

"Aye; but he fell by a bludgeon more likely."

"It's bad for poor Mary and the bairns anyhow; she's looked sad enough for long, 'cos of he's leaving her so. I know he went out nights after nights wi' they fellers, and now they've done for 'un."

"Ah! here be the carriage, and the doctor on his pony. He won't tell us lies now he's something serious to do; but lor' how he do tell tales! no one can possible believe 'un. When I've seen the master away I maun go to Hawtree Dell to the Quarry, and I all'ays think of poor old mother Pendle when I go there, and her being found buried in the snow, sitting on a stone as if asleep, with her bundle of sticks by her side; puir old bodie!—I should ha' been there at one o'clock but for them accidents."

The doctor rode up, gave his pony to one of the men, and proceeded to inquire of Mr. Askham how he felt, and ascertain what injuries he had sustained. As soon as his left arm was touched, or he was moved the least, the patient groaned. The tutored and gentle handling of the doctor,

combined with that natural careful touch as much given by nature as required by art, to the surgeon and those who have similar tastes, be they men or women, enabled him to take off Mr. Askham's coat with comparative ease, and the shirt being slit down from collar to wrist an examination of the injured arm was easily effected. No blood was to be seen, but the bruises were severe, and the shoulder, arm, and hand considerably swollen. He complained of a stiff neck and pains in the head, also of pain in the right elbow and hip, and he was evidently very much shaken, and in a nervous state. He walked with the assistance of the doctor to the carriage, and they drove together to the hall. His hat had saved his head, and having fallen suddenly he did not try to save himself, or his right arm on which he fell might have been broken. He did not speak during his drive home, which was a long one for the distance, owing to his being obliged, by the roughness of the road in the wood, to go at a foot's pace.

As they drove into the park, they saw Mrs. Askham driving by another road in her little carriage, and Mr. Askham told them to wait till she came up.

Great was her surprise and grief to see her husband brought home in this helpless and pitiable state. She had been out all the morning across the common, and knew nothing of what had occurred.

She got into the carriage, and heard from the doctor all that he knew about the accident, which however was not altogether much, for no one had actually seen Mr. Askham fall ; but it was concluded that a branch of the tree had struck him on the left shoulder and knocked him down, yet even the doctor was surprised that so comparatively small a branch—the dead top of which had been broken when it struck him, and being thrown up in the air had fallen again not far from where Mr. Askham had been standing—should have inflicted such severe injuries to the left shoulder. It was of no use to ask the patient, who had been almost in an unconscious state, and who himself asked how it happened. And so it remained a mystery.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGER.

ABOUT the time that Mr. Askham's accident occurred, there was great consternation and excitement in the village of Woodnaston, whither Jack Downes, a labourer at the Holt Farm, had dragged, rather than led, a pale, emaciated, sad-looking young man to the door of the surgeon, or as he was always styled, "Doctor" Vyal. With a loud tap, and ringing at every bell he could see, he announced his coming, and even to hasten the event he called aloud "Doctor, Doctor." The door was soon opened and the maid-servant said her master had not yet come in, though they expected him home half an hour or more ago. A crowd of villagers had assembled inside and outside the gate, with great pressing to see and hear what was going on, and demanding at once: "What's the matter?" "Who's the man?" "What has he done?" "Where did he come from?" "What is it, Jack?" "Take

him to the lock-up." "Is he ill?" "He looks clemmed." "Take him to the inn." "Where will ye put him?" "Let us see him." "Poor chap, he looks ready to faint." "There's blood on his face." "You've been fighting him, Jack." "Shame on ye, shame on ye!" "Take him to the parson's." "Aye, he'll give yer a talking to; for shame, Jack, for shame!" "Let's hear what he has to say." "To fight a puir cretur like he," said the women; "for shame, Jack Downes, for shame!" "And you a strong hale man, it's a downright shame on ye!" "I'd take he home wi' me sooner than he be so clemmed and beat, puir cretur!" said an old woman; "to see that a stranger can't come into the village but he is set upon and beat by the likes of ye, Jack, a great strong feller like ye, it's a shame to us all, it is!" "Take 'em to Mr. Askham, he's a magister." "Take Jack along, he's worse nor t'other puir chap."

And thus they went on, all speaking together, so that Jack Downes could neither answer them, nor, as they pressed upon him, could he move away with the man he still collared. The tide of favour ran with the captive stranger: it was

of no use for Jack to vociferate, "I tell ye I didn't, — I didn't fight he — I'll take he to the parson's till we can fetch the squire ; he's too weak or too frightened to go far, I take it."

"Don't 'ee hold him that fashion, ye'll choke he ; see, he's ready to fall."

And some women pressed forward to try and help the stranger, who looked ghastly and hardly able to stand.

"Take he to the parson's," was more and more the cry ; and at last a way was made for Jack and his captive to pass out of the little gate, and they all proceeded to the rectory, which was not a hundred yards off.

Mr. Dale was sitting in his study, which looked on to the carriage-drive to the house. Hearing a tramping noise he raised his eyes and seemed to be dreaming when he beheld the strange procession coming up and filling the road to his door. A scene like the present was quite beyond record in the little quiet village of Woodnaston. The whole population following the grim spectacle in front—the helpless, feeble, blood-stained man, dragged along by the stalwart

labourer. They assembled round the door, and Mr. Dale went out to meet them; they proved a picturesque group, some of the women weeping with their aprons to their eyes, children standing with half-open mouths, their eyes full of wonder and their hands behind them, or nervously twitching their pinafores, for they were not a little frightened at the novelty of the occurrence. The captive, shaking, trembling, shivering, and gasping, as though it were in the depth of winter instead of a bright summer's day, was a pitiable object; he could scarcely stand or hold his head up.

“Hey! and what's the matter now?” said the benevolent rector, whose genial face assumed the expression of sympathy and astonishment. “Jack Downes, what have you been about?—and who is this poor fellow you have brought?”

Jack Downes was one of the many wrestlers so famous in Cumberland formerly, and perhaps they are still to be found there; and the reason why not only the rector but the villagers settled the matter to his disadvantage was his known strength, his fighting propensities, and his prowess in the art, of which they imagined he

had unfairly taken advantage against a feeble adversary. But which, be it said to his honour, he would never have done; he scorned to wrestle with one inferior to himself, or to injure him in an encounter; so that these implied censures were most galling to him, and he longed for an opportunity to vindicate himself, but which he failed to obtain whilst the clamour was so loud against him.

All was silent now, however, and he began :
“ Please, sir——”

“ I don’t please, sir,” said the rector, “ to hear any complaints at this moment. I shall see the poor fellow whom you have brought here properly warmed, fed, and tended, before I hear anything about the reason for his coming here.”

“ Please, sir, he don’t deserve it,” said Downes.

“ Deserve it? Pray who ever gets what they deserve either for good or bad?” said the rector; “ if he has behaved ill, we will hear about it by-and-by; but it is evident he is suffering much, bodily, and perhaps in mind also. Come in, my poor fellow,” he said to the stranger. “ Loose him, Jack, he can’t run away.” Then turning

to the crowd of villagers, "Run one of you for the doctor."

"Please, sir," they screamed in chorus, "we've been there and he's out, so we come here."

"Robins," he said to his butler, "take this man into the kitchen. And you, Charles," to the footman, "be alert, and help, and don't stand there staring." Then to the villagers, "You can stay there or not as you please. Jack Downes, you had better come in and wait here; when the man is well enough to bear it, we'll hear your story and his."

When the stranger got into the kitchen, he sank down in the wooden arm-chair to which they conducted him, and sobbed convulsively. The well-trained servants were so accustomed to their master's benevolence ("vagaries" his enemies called it), that restoratives and food were promptly and judiciously administered. After a time he recovered a little, but the rector would not allow his face and hands to be washed until the doctor had seen him and heard the story of his advent.

When Mr. Dale went back to the porch he was again accosted by Downes in an impatient tone.

“ Please, sir, you are harbouring a murderer.”

“ A murderer ! ” shrieked the crowd.

“ A murderer ! ” said the rector ; “ what do you mean ? ”

“ Yes, sir, I found him a murdering of a man. Will Stokes, sir.”

“ Will Stokes murdered ! ” cried the crowd.
“ Oh—h—h ! ”

“ Impossible ! ” cried the rector ; “ you might as well tell me my little boy Jeffrey had done it. That poor weak fellow would have been a mere child in the hands of a burly fellow like Will Stokes.”

“ It’s quite true, sir, and he knows it. He has killed Will Stokes ; and he’s shamming now I know.”

“ Killed Will Stokes ? I tell you it is impossible. Shamming ? What do you mean ? ”

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE RECTORY.

WHEN the stranger had been taken into the Rectory the greater part of the villagers had dispersed, and at the mention of Will Stokes being murdered others ran off to spread the news; besides, it was about noon, the dinner hour not only of the labouring classes and shop-keepers but of those above them, so that the village had its full complement of inhabitants at that hour, and the report of the murder soon got round. The doctor, however, had not returned when the messenger from Mr. Dale went for him; his unwonted absence at that hour was a matter of much astonishment to his family, for he was punctual in his habits.

A story never loses, but like a snow-ball gathers as it runs; so it was with the vague report from Jack Downes, that Will Stokes was murdered by the sad-looking stranger. To Downes' few words the reporters added that

“Will Stokes’s blood and brains were scattered all over the road—one might know that by the blood on the murderer’s face ; that Jack Downes had seen him batter Will Stokes to death, and break all his bones ;” and so on ; “that it was done in the high road, and any one might see the place.”

Some set off up the road to see and verify the story, but returned, having found nothing except in one place where there were traces in the dust of a scuffle, but no dead body, no blood, no brains ; so, disappointed, they declared that either the stranger had accomplices or Jack Downes had told a lie.

“You may go and look for yourselves if you believe that story ; there’s no Will Stokes dead or alive, and no signs of a murder, only of a scuffle ; besides, how could that poor weak creature kill Will Stokes ? No ; it was a bad joke of Jack’s ; he knocked the poor fellow down himself, fighting or wrestling. He’d no business to put out his strength against such a weakling—more shame to him.”

In the mean time a labourer came to the village inn, saying with great emotion, “Where’s the

doctor? We must fetch a magistrate. Will Stokes is lying dead in the Fell meadow. I saw him as I passed, and we must know how he got his death."

"The doctor is out," said the innkeeper, "and the nearest magistrate is Mr. Askham; Jack Downes has found the murderer and taken him up to the rector."

So off the man ran without saying anything to other people whom he met, and went up to the Rectory, where still two or three of the most inquisitive remained at the gate waiting for the result of the stranger's being brought there; they followed the man in; Mr. Dale was talking to Downes at the door—as we left him in the last chapter.

"Sir," said he, "Will Stokes lies dead in the Fell meadow, and we don't know who's killed him, or how he came to his death."

"We've got the murderer here," said the villagers, "and he must be taken to the lock-up house."

"We should all be murderers," said the rector, "if we put that poor fellow into the lock-up house. He looks already at the verge of the

grave, and as to the accusation against him, I cannot believe it. However, we must inquire more about that. The man is safe in my custody until he is wanted elsewhere, and shall be taken care of. You had better go to your homes and your dinners," he said to the villagers. "Jack Downes, you remain here."

He then gave directions about the body, that it should remain where it lay, untouched, and watched by the men who brought the last news, until a doctor and a magistrate should arrive; and sent a message that the doctor should come to the Rectory as soon as possible. He gave orders in his house that no questions were to be asked either of Jack Downes or of the stranger, nor were they to be encouraged to talk. This injunction was not, however, needed for the stranger, who had sank into a sort of lethargy, with his eyes partly closed, and his heavy breathing was all that told he was alive. Jack Downes was taken to the servants' hall.

In answer to the question of the butler as to Jack's position, Mr. Dale said, "Of course he will sit down with you all to dinner. Every man is innocent till he is proved guilty."

The cook went to her mistress in some alarm, saying she was sure the man in the kitchen was going into a fever, and would it not be best to have him taken up to the loft? The loft was a good room over the stables where many a poor ailing stranger had been housed, waifs and strays, crippled or sick, and kept with all care till they recovered.

Mrs. Dale said on no account was he to be moved until the doctor came; but she went herself to see him, and was quite as much convinced as the cook that fever was upon him.

Long seemed the time when they were waiting for the arrival of the doctor and Mr. Askham, for Mr. Dale, not liking to leave the house at this juncture, had sent the groom on horseback with a note to acquaint Mr. Askham that the two men were at the Rectory, and to beg his attendance.

The noonday meals were awaiting the occupants both of kitchen and parlour, and were partaken of in each place with a silent astonishment and dread that considerably marred the appetites of all. So silent a meal in the servants' hall, where Charles the footman was wont to be the wit and talker of the assembly, supported by

the banter and laughter of the rest, had never been known before. The cook was uneasy concerning the welfare of the poor fellow in the kitchen ; and about the dinner being almost cold waiting so long upon the table ; the gravy of the mutton was covered with white solid-looking islands of fat ; the dough dumplings were still seething in the pot, overdone, altogether spoiled ! These misadventures preyed upon her sensitive mind, making her stern and somewhat sharp in her manner to all but the stranger ; he had her commiseration, and she frequently left the table to look after him.

“Thee’s a good appetite for dinner,” she said to Jack Downes.

“Aye, missus,” he replied ; “it don’t want no sauce, and it’s not often I git a chance like this. It’s uncommon good food.”

“It’s no a load upon your heart, then, to see yon puir feller look so ghost-like ?”

“I’se no load on my heart,” he replied, “it’s——”

“Hush,” said the butler ; “the master said nought was to be said,” and they again relapsed into silence.

In the mean time the doctor's servant had arrived, with a note from her mistress, saying the doctor had sent for medicines by a servant of Mr. Askham's, that she had sent word that he was wanted in the village as soon as he could come, and she expected him soon.

Mr. Dale was in a fidget; he was always impatient of being kept waiting, and Mrs. Vyal's note increased his uneasiness. What could have happened at the hall to detain Mr. Vyal? He had dined there the day before, when his friends were in perfect health, and he had heard of no accident or illness amongst the children—yet something must have occurred. He walked up and down the room musing, and finally, to the great relief of the children, who feared they knew not what, he left the room.

Jeffrey and his sisters sat quiet by their mother, the boy inquisitive as to what had happened, for they had all been in the nursery at the back of the house, and had seen nothing of the village procession; the little girls frightened at the unusual silence and solemnity of their dinner hour, which was usually so cheerful.

“Mamma,” said Jeffrey, “who is that man I saw in the kitchen as I passed?”

“I do not know, my dear.”

“Are you frightened, mamma?”

“No, my dear.”

“Is papa frightened? What is the matter? Has that man done anything wrong?”

Mrs. Dale replied that she did not know, and tried to divert the boy’s mind from the topic. But Jeffrey returned again and again to the charge. He wished to go out on his pony. He could not be content to amuse himself with a book. He wished to go to the kitchen and inquire about the stranger for himself.

She was relieved, therefore, when, anxiously looking at the clock and finding it past two o’clock, she heard the boy cry out, “Mamma, there is papa at the gate, and he is opening it for some one. Oh! it is Doctor Vyal; I know him by his saddle-bags,” he added, laughing and jumping about. “Shan’t we have some fun when he tells us some of his stories!”

Mrs. Dale went to the window and beckoned to her husband.

“Jeffrey can go out riding now, can he not?”

and the pony had better be brought round here."

"Yes," said Mr. Dale, "and John shall go with him. They shall take a note from me to Mr. Royle."

"That's right, papa ; I shall be sure to take it safely. May I go upstairs ?"

"Come with me, my dear," said his mother ; and she took him upstairs with her, that he might not go into the kitchen.

John had special orders to answer none of his questions. All were soon ready and started, taking, to get to Mr. Royle's, quite the opposite direction from the village.

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE HALL.

WHEN Mr. Askham got to his room, and the doctor had examined him again, it was found that the right hip and elbow were much bruised—the hip severely; probably from falling on some stones.

The woodman who brought the news of the accident was questioned in the servants' hall as to how it happened; but he could give no account, for the tree had fallen in a different direction to what had been expected, and all the men saw was that with the tree Mr. Askham too had fallen; and at the same time a piece of dead wood had sprung up in the air with a crashing noise. Next they found him lying on the ground, with a branch—"a goodish stiff 'un"—close by his shoulder, but not touching him.

The Doctor said there were evidently two contusions: one on the top of the left shoulder,

near the collar-bone—which he considered would have been broken but for the snapping of the branch ; and another on the point of the shoulder, where something hard and pointed, but not sharp, must have struck him most forcibly. He could not conceive how this last injury had been effected.

However, he very wisely concluded, “ all must remain conjecture where there is no probability of learning the reality.” And he said no more about it.

Mr. Askham was extremely sensitive to pain. Though a man of good nerve and great bodily strength, yet he could not repress a slight shriek when his left arm was touched or raised the least ; so it was considered advisable that he should be kept quiet for a few days. He remained in his room, and his left arm was put in a sling ; but he was altogether so shaken and bruised that he begged, after he had partaken of his luncheon, to be in bed ; and there he lay in a semi-unconscious state for some time. The Doctor proceeded with Mrs. Askham to the dining-room, and partook of a hearty luncheon—which was in fact his dinner. No one appre-

ciated the good things of this world better than he did ; and in the midst of this epicurean enjoyment came the messenger who had been sent to his own house, bringing the medicines sent for ; and also a message from Mrs. Vyal, requiring his immediate presence at the Rectory. Very shortly after, Mr. Dale's groom arrived with a note for Mr. Askham, which his wife took up to him. She had been too much occupied with the state of her husband to heed other reports, and, but for the information given in Mr. Dale's note, she would have known nothing of what had passed in the village. She took the note to him, saying :

“This is for you, George, and an immediate answer is required.”

“Read it, my love,” he said in a low voice.

She opened the note and gave a start on reading it ; it ran thus :

“DEAR ASKHAM,

“Will you come to my house as soon as you can ? Jack Downes and the villagers have brought a man here under accusation of being the murderer of Will Stokes ; to me, a very improbable story. I have both the accused and the accuser here, the former quite prostrate and not in a state to be moved.

“Faithfully yours,

“ALAN DALE.”

Mrs. Askham recovered herself, and fearing the shock to her husband, merely said :

“ It is from Mr. Dale, asking you to go there on magistrate’s duty. I will write and say you cannot go.”

“ Yes,” in a faint tone was all he answered.

She therefore sent back a note, telling in a few words of the accident, adding that the Doctor, who was still at the hall, would be at the Rectory as soon as he could.

Whilst the groom was waiting for the note the servants took care to ask all that he knew about Will Stokes ; a slight account had been already given by the labourer to the woodmen, by them to the coachman whilst the doctor was attending to Mr. Askham in the wood, and this the coachman had repeated to the servants on his return to the hall. From Mr. Dale’s groom, however, they did not learn more than that the villagers brought Jack Downes and the stranger to the Rectory, and that the latter was a tall thin young man. For John was a man of few words and no imagination ; he could tell correctly what he knew, but he could not go beyond what he actually saw and heard. So the servants gave

him up as “no good,” and in return only told him that their master had been brought home hurt, from the woods. Their minds were too full of the novelty of a murder to allow of comments or exaggerations on meaner topics, and they discussed together the account that the messenger to the Doctor’s house brought back, which was charmingly horrible, embodying all the terrible reports current on the subject. Every one was on the alert—frightened and curious—longing for more news of the murder, yet dreading to hear it.

The housekeeper went to her mistress with a solemn face to ask after Mr. Askham, declaring that she was “in such a tremble at all these dreffle events that she could scarcely stand. Had her mistress heard of the shocking murder? Thank God, they had got the murderer safe at the Rectory. She only wondered Mr. Dale was not afraid to harbour such a villain. Poor Will Stokes! What harm had he done to any one that he should be set upon and battered to death! Scarce a bit of him left, they say. Well, to be sure!—there are wicked people on the earth!—(with a sigh)—why poor innocent folks could not

be walking along the king's highway, without being murdered, it was more than she could think ! People grew wickedder and wickedder !—(again a sigh)—poor Mary Stokes, and the children too !—(here a very deep sigh)—what would they do without some one to keep them, poor innocents !—(a sigh)—and for all this to happen on the top of master's being so fearful hurt ! There was trouble, indeed, for all !”—(a very deep sigh, and a few tears wiped away with the corner of her apron).

Mrs. Askham said she hoped there was not so much injury done to her master from the fall and the blow from the tree as at first there appeared to be. He must be kept quiet in the house for a short time and then he would be quite well again ; but he must not be told of the murder, for it would greatly distress him. Had she (Cubberd, the housekeeper) heard where and when it had taken place ? Did she know any particulars ?

“ I have only heard, ma'am, what the men said, and that is bad enough. They say Jack Downes, who brought the murderer into the village, saw him at it, for the man is a great strapping fellow,

covered with blood, and it would take a good strong man to master Will Stokes, I should say ; it must have happened just now, ma'am, whilst we were at dinner in the kitchen perhaps."

Mrs. Askham again desired that nothing should be said about it in the hearing of the children, nor should Mr. Askham know it ; and she left Mrs. Cubberd still sighing over the horrors of the situation, and wondering "how missis could take it so quiet. This shocking thing ! that happened while we was all eating our dinners. Well, to be sure !" was her ejaculation to herself as she went downstairs, "gentlefolks haven't much thought for others ! To see how unconcerned like missis do take poor Will Stokes, as though he was no better nor a dog, and he be their own shepherd too. One would say they'd no feeling for nobody. And yet," she continued, after a pause, "they be as kind and good master and missis as ever came into the world." And with this wholesome conclusion she went to the kitchen, to get rid of her excitement by scolding the still-room maid, who had done nothing to deserve it.

The news of the day spread fast, and in the

evening Farmer Giles came up to the hall to inquire after "the Squire," and was very grieved to hear how severely he had been hurt. He was so blithe and gay in the morning, talking to him and his wife ; and much shocked too the farmer was to hear of Will Stokes's death.

"To be sure ! To think that two dreadful things as they was both should happen in one day ; and Will Stokes whiles we was at dinner !" said the housekeeper, and she had a long story to tell to him of her own fears, and longer comments to make on the wickedness of mankind. "And lor', Mr. Giles," she continued, "we'd the finest round of biled beef ye ever saw, for dinner, wi' carrots and suet dumplins fit for a king, and we all a' enjoying it so and eatin' hearty, while that poor fellow, who'd done no wrong to nobody, was a dying his shameful death ! It's horrid to think on, it is."

"I'm right glad you enjyed your dinners so, mum, and I wish I'd been of the comp'ny, I'm pertickler fond of biled beef and dumplins ; but begging your pardon, mum," said the farmer, "I don't think they be no wickeder now nor ever they was. Why we hear tell o' murders the

very first thing in the Bible ; the Bible's full on 'em ; so like enough there'd be some now-a-days. But lauk, mum," he continued, "don't ye be down-hearted ; it's true Will Stokes be killed, but they've been a filling your head wid a passel o' lies aboon it. I don't b'lieve a word of 'em. There maun be a increst, and I shall go and hear what they say."

"Ah, that's right. Do, Mr. Giles," said the housekeeper ; "and I dare say master will let some of us go too. It's right we should know about things as is brought right to our door. And such a poor innocent man as Will Stokes ! —(with a sigh)—after that, we're none of us safe in our beds."

"Tut, tut, mum," said the farmer, "ye mauna be so timorous like. We're all safe enough, and I don't myself think Will Stokes was just such a innocent babby as you say," he added, laughing ; "and so I'll wish ye good evening," mum, and I'm right glad to hear the master is going on well."

In a day or two Mr. Askham could put his foot to the ground, though the knee and hip were still very painful, and he was obliged to use a

crutch. The Doctor was pleased at his progress, but the left arm and hand remained in the same swollen and painful state. The Doctor informed Mrs. Askham he thought it best to tell her husband what had occurred to Will Stokes, for an inquest must be held, and there would be much talk about it.

The Doctor undertook to break the news to him. The Squire seemed much interested, asking questions, wanting the most minute details, declaring the young man accused could not have done it; then vowing, in an excited way, that he must go to the inquest. But on this the Doctor at once put his veto. Mr. Askham could not walk, and must be kept very quiet, and it would not be well for him to attend; there was no necessity for it, or for his running so great a risk, when fever might ensue from the worry and excitement. The inquest could be held at once, as the coroner was on his way from Carlisle, and he should hear all that passed if he could bear it.

CHAPTER X.

THE ACCUSED AND THE SLAIN.

AFTER his sumptuous repast at the hall, Mr. Vyal hastened to the Rectory. Mr. Dale met him at the gate, and as they walked to the house the Doctor told Mr. Dale of the accident to Mr. Askham, and received in return a short account of what had passed in the village. They then went into the kitchen to see the stranger, who was much revived.

After examining the wounds on the head, and the scratch on the wrist, from which there was also blood, the Doctor said :

“ How did you come by these wounds ? ”

“ I fell, sir, on a heap of stoanes as I was running.”

“ What stones ? ”

“ The flinders ta side of the road.’

“ What road ? ”

“ Ta road to the village, sir.”

“ Where were you running to ? ”

“A man pursued me, my foot stumbled, and I fell on the stoanes, for I’m not over strong.”

“How did you get this wound on your wrist?”

“A nail in the stile caught it and my sleeve too; it torn a piece of that out, see.”

“You are suffering from fever; how is that?”

“I’ve been sick at the cottage these many days.”

“What cottage?”

“The cottage on ta peat moor.”

“Get up.”

In a tottering way, holding on to the table, the man got up, but could scarcely stand.

“Sit down again. Bed is the proper place for you,” said the Doctor; and went out with the Rector.

“It’s a farce, sir,” said Mr. Vyal, “a ridiculous farce, to tell me that man murdered any one in his state of health, much less Will Stokes. Why, it would take me to do that. That chap has no more strength in him than a flaun; and I doubt if even in his strongest health he could have knocked Stokes down. What’s to be done?”

The man is in a fever ; probably a relapse from the illness he mentioned."

"He shall stay here," said the Rector ; "the loft shall be his resting-place till he is well."

"Well done," said the Doctor, shaking hands with him ; "your heart is always in the right place."

They returned to the kitchen, and the Doctor proceeded to wash the man's face and hands. There was some gravel in the wound on the side of the head, which corroborated his story of falling upon a heap of stones. The wound on the wrist was trivial ; that on the head was neither deep nor dangerous. The hair was cut away and a plaister put over. Finally, he was established in the loft, bed evidently being the best place for him.

"And now," said the Doctor, "I must see the body. Where is it?"

He and the Rector walked off together to the Fell meadow ; not above a mile distant. There they found a crowd of people, kept at a distance by Ned Flinders ; he it was who reported that the body lay there. Mr. Royle had not arrived.

So fully had Mr. Dale's instructions been carried out, that the trifling marks in the path were not obliterated.

There lay Will Stokes!—a model of muscular strength; not a particle of his apparel disturbed. He was lying on his back, with his arms extended; his hat at a short distance; and a formidable club-like stick by him. He might have been asleep, but for the deep shadow of death on his face, and the bitter expression of countenance. There were scarcely any marks of a scuffle on the path. Some of the bystanders said he had died in a fit; the Doctor pronounced the cause a blow on the temple, delivered on that particular spot which causes instant death. But the angry expression of the face suggested that a blow or blows had been given as well as received by him. He had been dead three or four hours, he said; but a special examination would have to be made before any further report could be given.

A man was despatched to the village for a stretcher, and the body was taken to the inn to await the inquest. At this time Mr. Royle arrived; and finally, the villagers made up the

procession before, behind, and around the corpse as it was carried to the inn.

As they walked back to the village, Mr. Vyal, in answer to questions from Mr. Dale and Mr. Royle, said he feared a serious accident had befallen Mr. Askham; his left shoulder was injured in a most unaccountable manner. A bad bruise and contusion appeared on the top of the shoulder and collar-bone; but there was an injury to the point of the shoulder with extravasation of blood, which was most alarming. The arm and hand were greatly swollen, and he shrieked when they were touched.

“Ah,” said Mr. Dale, “he was always very sensitive to pain.”

“He may well be sensitive now; if the bone had been broken it would be better for him. It will be as black as your hat by to-morrow; not that that is anything to be concerned about, but I fear the bone is injured, and he may feel it all his life.”

“How did it happen?” said Mr. Royle.

“That’s what I want to know,” said the Doctor. “No one saw the accident; and they

had moved him away from the place where he fell, before I arrived. The woodmen were so occupied with the falling tree, that, except in shouting to him to move out of the way, they did not notice him. All that they knew was that the tree had fallen, and so had he; and he seemed insensible when they went up to him. A large piece of dead wood was broken off as the tree fell; probably when it struck him down the piece flew up in the air. It would take a stronger blow than from dead wood to produce the injury to the point of the shoulder; which also indicates that a pointed, though blunt, spur or small branch came in contact with it. I did not speak of this to any one in the house, for they were sufficiently alarmed already. The right hip and elbow are much bruised, but that is altogether a minor consideration to the left shoulder and arm."

They were grieved to hear this account, and remarked on the uncommon occurrence of two such startling events on the same day.

The Doctor said that until the body had been examined in search of other injuries, he could not say for certain; but his firm conviction was,

that Will Stokes had quarrelled with some other man, and that a blow from the fist of his antagonist had caused his death. A blow from the cudgel beside him would not leave the same mark as that on the temple; which must have been given before death.

The next question was : Did his wife know of it? Mr. Dale said he should imagine she did not, as her cottage was the other side of the park, and he would ride up there to see her and break the news to her.

He went home, and without loss of time was on his way to Ashencroft gate, where she lived. He found Mary Stokes busy spinning, her children at play by her side. The sad expression her face had of late borne was there; but she was very placid, and there was no semblance of deep sorrow, nor that she had recently been agitated by bad news.

She got up from her wheel when she saw Mr. Dale approach, and curtseyed.

“ Good day, Mary,” said he, in a solemn voice.

“ Good day, sir,” she answered timidly, rather alarmed to see the Rector’s usually good-

humoured face so over-cast. "Won't you walk in, sir? I hope you're well, sir."

Finding her so much on the alert, almost startled, as it were, expectant of evil, Mr. Dale had, he thought, an easier task before him in breaking the sad news to her than if she had been blithe and gay as of yore. He answered her question, and asked after her own health, her occupations, her children; all in the same solemn tone. At last she said:

"Why sure, sir, something has happened to make you so grave."

"Yes, Mary, something has happened. Tell me; when did you last see your husband?"

"Oh dear, oh dear!" she cried, "he be taken!"

"Taken, Mary? where should he be taken to?"

"Oh, sir, them fellers; I know'd they'd get him into harm."

"What fellows?"

"They poachers, sir; oh dear, oh dear!"

"Who are they?"

"I daren't name 'em, sir, it might be worse for him. Oh! that he should ever have taken up with them!"

“What do you expect to hear, Mary?”

“That he’s been took to pris’n for being with them.”

“When did you see him last?”

“It was this morning before four o’clock that he went out.”

“When did he say he would be back?”

“He said he might be very late, or not till to-morrow.”

“Was he in the habit of going away like this?”

She hesitated—“It’s no use telling a lie, sir. Mr. Askham knows he has neglected his work this long time, and he’ll turn us away, I know he will,” she said crying. “Sam Wade often complains of him. It makes me that sad and worried, all my happiness is gone.”

“Where did he say he was going to when he left you this morning?”

“He only said he was going to the monthly market, and bade me keep heart. I said to him: ‘Oh, Will, leave they bad fellers and go to your work. It’s sair time for me waiting here, and you away with them. What will I and the bairns do if you be taken!’ Have you heard that he be took, sir?”

“No—but could you bear to hear that he would not come back again?”

“Oh, sir,” she cried, “say the word—Is he took?”

“Mary,” he said very solemnly, “God only knows how it happened; but your husband was found—”

“Oh where, sir”—

“In the Fell Meadow.”

“With them?”

“Alone, Mary—DEAD!”

“Ah!” she said with a loud shriek, and clasped her hands, raising them on high. “DEAD! did you say? DEAD! Oh! they bad men,” she exclaimed, shuddering.

She walked about the room as one distracted, gasping for breath, and wringing her hands; many tears had trickled down her cheeks during the former part of the conversation, but her glaring eyes were tearless now.

“I maun go to him, sir,” she said after a long pause. “Come, bairns, we’ll go to father.” And she took the youngest in her arms. “We’ll go to the Fell meadow; come, bairns.”

“You will not find him there, Mary; his

body had to be taken to the inn to await the inquest."

"Waes me! Waes me!" she cried.
"Come, bairns, we'll go anyhow."

She walked hurriedly out of the cottage, heeding nothing, not even the elder child of three years, who could not keep up with her, and began to whimper. Mr. Dale put the lad on his horse, holding him there as he walked by the side. The child's prattle of delight was the only sound heard. Mr. Dale walked silently along a little behind poor Mary, who was wholly absorbed by her grief. She walked on and on, over the heath as in a dream, without speaking; but when she got to the stile into the Fell meadow, she exclaimed, "Ah! there's blood. There's a piece of his shirt!" And taking the shred from the nail on which it hung, she put it into her pocket; her stern face assuming even a harder expression.

Mr. Dale had to continue on the road outside the field, the shorter path giving Mary the advantage. Her pace getting more and more hurried as she came near the village, she reached the inn several minutes before he did.

“ Waes me ! waes me ! ” he heard her crying with loud sobs, as he came into the inn. The landlady was also weeping. “ Puir young creetur ! ” she said, “ her trouble’s come.”

Mr. Dale was glad that poor Mary had softened into tears, and left her and the children to the care of the landlady.

“ Oh, sir,” said the latter, as he was going away, “ what a awful look the face has got. It’s enough to scare a body.”

“ It is not a pleasant expression, certainly,” said Mr. Dale, and rode home.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MISSES CAVENDISH.

AMONGST the most amiable and accomplished ladies in the neighbourhood of Woodnaston, were the Misses Cavendish of Ravenscrag Manor—ladies “of a certain age,” who lived together in the house that had been their father’s, and in which they had all been born. Everything about the house and grounds was kept up as he left it; their loyalty would not admit any alteration or further adornments except in the matter of flowers in the garden. The old-fashioned mansion had its high, narrow, plate-glass windows, four on each side of the wide porticoed glass door, which entered into a capacious hall, hung with trophies of arms and of the chase. The story above had the same large windows, but that over the door was much larger than the rest, and arched at the top. Had the house not been imbedded, as it were, in ivy it would have had a very formal appearance; but as it was, it looked

comfortably suited to all seasons ; the ivy even encircled the massive stacks of chimneys. The respectable appearance of the old coach with fat Flemish horses, and the old-fashioned attendants, were quite in keeping with the house. The cumbersome vehicle came round every day to take the ladies out for “an airing,” and Mr. Royle had made a calculation that the greatest speed obtainable “on a pinch” might be six miles in the hour, on level ground ; and he declared he had met it drawling along scarcely above a foot’s pace, the coachman, footman, and the ladies inside the coach, all asleep ; and that he awoke them with a start by calling out “Halloo, here ! you’re on the wrong side of the road !” He waited till they made room for him, when he drove past, bowing to the ladies, Miss Jane looking still only half awake, but Miss Amelia alert enough to frown at him. But, “Mr. Royle is censorious ;” so everybody said !

The Misses Cavendish had brothers and sisters married, but they all lived at a distance. Their eldest brother lived in the next county, and his second son, Tom, was the special favourite of his aunts at Ravenscrag. It was said by those who

gossip over other people's affairs, that he would inherit their estate; but the "old ladies," as they were called, never said a word on the subject.

The Misses Cavendish were four in number—Miss Selina, the eldest, had all special rights of authority vested in her; the landed property was hers, and at her final disposal, though each of the sisters was to succeed to it for the term of her existence—if unmarried. Jane was the name of the second, Charlotte the third, and Amelia the youngest. They each had their special qualification. Selina, as lady of the manor and housekeeper, was quite equal to her position—wise, friendly, and discreet. She had a stately manner that was apt to overawe the timid; but her sisters declared it added much to their security, for it kept bad people aloof. They said, "Who can stand against her searching glance, and who is not gratified by her kindly commendation?" She and Jane were the nearest of age, and were like twins in stature as in thought; though Jane was of a timid disposition, and rested for support on the strength of character of her elder sister, of whom she was

the devoted admirer. Charlotte was the active and useful body, ready to act at home or abroad, the life and soul of the family and of every assembly ; her cheerful face and musical voice as welcome in the cottage as in the drawing-room. Amelia was much her junior, and was looked upon by them all as one to be petted and spoiled, never to be contradicted, whose wishes were always to be first considered. She was not so sweet-tempered as her sisters, and was apt to have a sharp tongue, and be somewhat dictatorial without meaning to be unkind. Mr. Royle, who was inclined to pass judgment upon people, used to say of her, when he had seen the sisters give way to her : " As usual, her detestable domineering temper governs them all." But this, like most of his criticisms, was too harsh ; she was not naturally detestable, only spoiled. She could be as charming a person as one would wish to meet ; but she was easily ruffled ; she spoke hastily, and piquing herself upon her honesty and justice, was often both rude and unjust.

They were all sitting in the drawing-room the day after the village excitement of finding

Will Stokes' body, and had been discussing the news which was brought to them that morning, when Mr. Royle rode up.

Immediately after the customary greeting, he began, "Well, ladies, have you heard the news?"

"We have heard this morning a very sad tale," said Miss Cavendish.

"Well, what do you think of this murder, ma'am?"

"It appears to me perfectly incomprehensible," she answered.

"It is; and if it had not been that Jack Downes himself brought in the supposed culprit, and was known to have been at work up to the time at the Holt farm, one would have said that no one but he was capable of overpowering such a strong fellow as Will Stokes—the bully of the neighbourhood I called him—for he was up and ready for a fight on the smallest provocation."

"I should not have given him quite so bad a character, Mr. Royle," said Miss Cavendish; "I know he was a surly fellow very often, but hardly so bad as you say."

"Well, perhaps I did put the case rather

strongly, but he was as unpleasant a fellow as ever I met. I pity his widow, for she will have a hard matter to keep her house and children.”

“No doubt Mr. Askham will be as kind a friend to her as he is to others. I am sorry to hear he has met with an accident,” said Miss Jane.

“Yes, indeed, and one that might have been most serious.” Then turning to Amelia, he said, “You remember, Miss Amelia, that young oak that was struck by lightning last summer, in the wood?”

“Yes, perfectly well; you mean close by the enclosure gate; that is, not very far from it; where the blackberries grow so fine?”

“Ah, yes,” said he, laughing; “ladies are sure to remember where the blackberries are to be found. It was that oak that was being felled, and the men couldn’t get Mr. Askham away from under it. He seemed deaf, he wouldn’t move away; and before the woodmen expected it, the tree fell, and knocked him down. It’s the most foolish thing I ever heard of; a child might have known better.”

“We do not know what might have been

occupying his mind at the moment," said Miss Jane; "he might have been looking on quite interested in what the men were about, and so did not see the danger."

"Oh no, he stood with his back to the tree, but evidently his mind was preoccupied."

"Have you heard if he is much hurt?"

"He was quite stunned at first; they could not make him understand anything."

"Dear, dear! Charlotte, when the carriage comes round, you will please go and inquire after him," said Miss Cavendish.

"You will not see him," said Mr. Royle; "he is ordered to keep his bed; he will not be out again for a long time, I expect."

"Dear, dear! poor Mrs. Askham!" she continued, "what a shock to her. Ah, there is the carriage. Charlotte, do not forget that basket for Mrs. Dale."

"The Dales have a queer visitor just now," said Mr. Royle; "they have kept the man whom Jack Downes brought into the village, and he is, they say, ill with a fever."

"Ill with a fever!" said Miss Jane; "then how could he have killed poor Stokes?"

“ Well, Jack Downes declares he is shamming ; but Vyal, who ought to know, says it’s a relapse into a low fever he had lately. To be sure !—the Rector’s vagaries with regard to sick tramps are remarkable always ; but this surpasses them all ! ”

“ Do you know who this man is ? ”

“ No ; no one knows, and Dale will not have him questioned.”

“ Did you see him ? ”

“ Yes ; but he was, or pretended to be, in a heavy sleep. The Doctor said he would soon be better.”

“ Why do you say he pretended, and that he was shamming ? ” asked Amelia, in an angry tone.

“ I merely repeat what I was told,” he answered. .

“ Not by Mr. Dale,” said Amelia.

“ No ; certainly not,” he replied.

“ Then why be so ready to condemn the man, Mr. Royle ? I think at least we ought to wait till we hear his story,” she returned, in an indignant tone.

“ Amelia, my dear sister,” said Miss Cavendish,

“the carriage is waiting, remember.”

“I shall go in to see Mrs. Dale, Selina,” was the answer, with an angry look at Mr. Royle, which he did not see.

“Do as you like, dear sister.”

“Have you heard anything about the meeting at York?” said Miss Cavendish to Mr. Royle, when Amelia and Charlotte were gone.

“Yes; I was there, and it went off very well. Our old member was as eloquent as usual, and the Mayor hit off his subject admirably; but our new member, Mr. Standover, is a sad stick; couldn’t say half a dozen words without stammering and stuttering, and scarcely seemed to have an idea in his head.”

“That is very strange,” said Miss Jane; “no doubt he was nervous, and perhaps municipal questions are new to him; he is a very fluent talker.”

“Yes, my dear lady; but a fluent talker is a very different thing to a good speaker. You have the assistance of the remarks of others when you are conversing with them, but there is a concentration, an arrangement of thought requisite in making a set speech in public, which

requires quite a different exercise of the mind. It is, in fact, as much a gift to be a good public speaker, as to be a sculptor or a painter, and there may be a certain amount of nervousness, as you observe, in addition. But under any, the most advantageous circumstances, I do not consider Mr. Standover will ever be a good speaker."

"But he will certainly improve by practice."

"May be ; a little. The subject of his speech, however, was not a fertile one ; not much can be made out of drainage and cleansing the Ouse."

"Was anything said about the better lighting of the city?" said Miss Cavendish ; "for last year not half the street lamps were lit."

"The fisheries were not good, if you remember, last year, nor the year before. The Whitby ships did not bring home good cargoes, and the dearness and scarcity of labour, through the armaments for the war, made it doubly hard times ; but no doubt when you go there this next winter you will find it better lighted. There was a question as to a field which the Corporation want to purchase, but they cannot find the owner."

“Can they not find his name?”

“It appears the name is known, but the owner, or owners, for it is in two names, are not forthcoming; much to their disadvantage, for the price of land has greatly risen in the last ten or twenty years; it might have an increase of a quarter or more over the original cost.”

“Surely lawyers could find out.”

“Well, it appears that the rental of the land has been paid into a bank for many years to the names of the owners, and has not been drawn. I should suppose if the Corporation decide on trying to purchase it, it must be advertised.”

“In that case it will be easily ascertained; either the persons themselves, or their heirs, will be sure to respond,” said Miss Cavendish.

“Their not having received the rent, or applied for it for so long, would indicate that the persons are dead and there are no heirs.”

“So then,” said Miss Cavendish, “it will revert to the king.”

“Exactly; but I should infer that the owners are not dead, or it would have been known. I take it the owners are of independent means, and not obscure people.”

“Oh, the bankers must know,” said Miss Jane; “and heirs, if it has reverted to them, are not apt to be so long in claiming property, if ever so small.”

“As far as size is considered,” he answered, “the field—it is but one field—is not large. I should suppose ten or twelve acres the extent of it, and it is in shocking order, as bare as a wilderness, they say. But the value is in the situation, which is close to one of the gates, and in that quarter where the city is likely to extend. In the case of its being wanted for building, it probably would fetch a very large sum.”

“It is an interesting case,” said Miss Cavendish; “I shall watch for it in the York paper.”

“I do not imagine it will be long before you will see some mention of it; first, probably, advertizing for the owners. But in the next ‘Herald’ you will see all about the last meeting, and mention made of the ‘Willow Close,’ which is the field we have been talking about.” Mr. Royle then got up to take his leave.

“We will read it; good-bye; our compliments to Mrs. Royle.”

“Certainly ; good morning, ladies.” And he departed.

When he was gone, Miss Jane said, “Now why cannot he be always as he is to-day !”

“His censorious manner is often annoying, but to-day it was scarcely needed, he had only to relate what he knew ; but I fear dear Amelia, who has so great an aversion to him, and shows it, unfortunately, will not escape his censure.”

“Dear Amelia, she cannot endure to hear the absent spoken ill of.”

“Yet, Jane, she does not spare Mr. Royle.”

“She has had an unconquerable aversion to him from the first moment she saw him ; she declares he is more than unjust.”

“It is very sad ; I wish she could control her impatience : she will get into trouble some day, which will vex us all.”

“Oh, no, Selina, do not say that.”

“Alas ! I feel it will be so.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE WEAVER'S STORY.

THE stranger was much better, and Mr. Dale sent for him into his study.

“Tell me,” said Mr. Dale, “who you are.”

“My name, sir, is Eam Greenwood.”

“What did you say?” said Mr. Dale.

“They call me Eam Greenwood; my christened name is Edmund, and Eam is one short for it.”

“Ah! well, proceed.”

And in the broadest Yorkshire dialect, which need not be transcribed word for word, Greenwood continued:

“Yes, sir, Eam Greenwood is the name I’m known by. I’m a weaver by trade, and we’re all of us weavers and spinners.”

“Whom do you mean by ‘all of us’?”

“I mean, sir, all my family, and the neighbours too, except a few.”

“Where do you come from?”

“ I come from Todmorden and Hebden Bridge, in Yorkshire.”

“ Aye,” said Mr. Dale, “ a pretty country ; I know it well.”

“ Well, sir, if you know it well, you will know how we are mostly weavers and our women spinners, and some of our men spin too—the coarse hemp and wool ; the women spin the fine wool and flax.”

“ What brought you to this part of the country, so far away from your home ? ”

“ I go with father on his rounds twice a year, with pack-horses with the goods and the yarn.”

“ At what time of the year do you go ? ”

“ In spring, and just before winter ; in April, and then in October, to be home before the worst weather sets in. But our longest turns are in spring.”

“ How many horses have you in a train ? ”

“ From nine to eleven, sir. The leader has bells on his neck, and sometimes the last horse also, in a very long train.”

“ Eleven horses is a long train, surely.”

“ Nay, sir ; I shouldn't call it but a goodish one. But they do run with large dealers to

twenty or thirty horses. It just depends on the business."

"You have a good business, have you?"

"Our trading is pretty good."

"How long have you been carrying it on?"

"We're known on the road these hundred years, sir; our trade hasn't altered. We go our rounds, and our customers know what we shall bring them: good flannels, good yarn, and linen."

"Do you spin cotton also?"

"No, sir; we don't spin cotton, it hasn't come to us yet. We've enough of wool and linen."

"Is it some time since you left home?"

"Aye, sir, a goodish bit, more's the pity, for there's no one to come to me, except when faither came, since I was left on the road."

"How do you mean, 'left on the road?'"

"Well, sir, I mean since I was took bad, and faither couldn't stop, and had to leave me; they were very good to me at the place I stopped at, but it's not like home."

"How did this happen?"

"It fell out this way, sir: We'd been the greatest part of our rounds, and had pretty

empty packs; the sun got hot, and I felt queerish for a day or two, when all of a sudden I fell off the leader, the bell-horse."

"Did you always ride?"

"No, sir; I was riding because somehow my legs ached so, and my head was so dazed, I couldn't walk. Faither had the hackney, and our men were riding by turns; I took my turn with the men."

"Did your father always ride?"

"I let faither take a turn of walking at times, for he said his legs got stiff and cold, but it's best for him to ride."

"Is he in bad health?"

"No, sir, but he's getting on in years. The spring journeys are getting too much for him I think, so does mother; it's bad for him to get tired, but it's his real pleasure. He has done it all his life, and he likes to see his old acquaintances—friends I may call 'em—for he's 'good fellow well met' wherever he goes."

"Are the spring journeys the longest?"

"Yes, sir, and the most tiring, because it gets hot before we get home. In the fall of the year we don't go so far, and take only flannels. Our

people have full work to spin, and work at the hemp and flax by the spring."

"Go on with your story. How about your illness?"

"Well, sir, we had been a great part of our rounds, as I said, and had done a good business, but faither had an order for Whitehaven, so we trended off by a way we did not well know, for we hadn't travelled it before, and it made us late in the month. We were going over a vast moor, like our moors in Yorkshire; it was oxy in parts, the sun hot, and no shade anywhere about. I felt badish before, but this moor seemed a sort of quagmire-like, everything a shimmering and a shaking and steaming-like, and I was all dazed together. I says to faither: 'Faither,' says I, 'how does this place look to you?' 'It looks no worse nor another,' says he. 'Faither,' says I, 'this place is no cannie; it's shimmering and shaking like; it's steaming and sickening. I'm quite dazed, and my head's doited and heavy till I can't scarce hold up. Will you ride first, for I'm just dinged and not like to lead the way?' 'Sure, lad, you're over hungry,' said he; 'it's food you want; you're

clemmed, lad. Keep up a good heart, we shall soon be out.' 'Please God we may,' says I. 'But,' says I, 'we saw the will-o'-the-wisp last night, and there's no luck to some of us when he's seen, and he's taking his turn at me sure enough.' I mind I had a dinging in the ears, and I slipped down, I don't know how; but faither told me after, what I've been telling you, for I'd clean forgot all about it. So, as I said, I felt so queer I couldn't sit up or hold on, and I slipped off all of a sudden; and I can't say what happened after that, till I found me in a strange place in bed. I called for faither and muther, and Abie, and Tum, and Jooas, but none of 'em come. A candle was burning low; the whole place looked dark and lonesome-like. I set to calling again. I couldn't move, and a strange woman came in softly, and says she was glad to hear me speak. 'Will ye have some parritch, lad?' says she. 'Nay, but I'd like some pobs,' says I. 'Pobs?' says she. 'Aye, pobs,' says I, and she set a laughing; 'there's naithin' foiner nor mee-al pobs,' says I. 'Faix,' says she, 'mebbe it's parritch ye be a speaking about. It's the finest thing on airth for a sick

bodie.' 'Then,' says I, 'if ye be a christened woman gi'e me some,' says I. So off she goes, and the room sets to swimming-like, round and round like a bowl in a tub o' water. The next thing I mind was the room all dark, and I screaming for Abie. 'Well, lad,' says the strange woman, coming in with a light, 'dinna skreek so; here's the parritch getting cold waiting for ye. Ye ha' been sleeping well, sure enough.' And she raised me up wi' one arm and gi' me a spoonful wi' t'other hand. And I clutched the spoon and took some more helps, she crying, 'stop, stop,' but I didn't stop, and they be the best pobs I ever ate. I never ate any more like that, afore or since. It was rare, raal good pobs."

"Did you get better soon?" said Mr. Dale.

"Yes, sir; but I was fairly worked out after that. She put me straight in bed, and when I woke it was broad daylight and the sun shining into the open window, so warm and pleasant, with a sweet smell of flowers, and birds singing and chirruping, and bees humming, and flies dancing in the sunbeams. Lors! that was pleasant. 'Abie!' I cried, 'Abie! Abie!' A

woman came, saying, 'I'm no Abie, I'm called Meeary. How's ye feeling, lad? Will ye have some mair pobs, as ye call it?' and she laughed well and loud. 'Aye,' says I; 'Aye, Meeary, gi' me some like the strange woman gi' me times ago.' 'Puir laddie!' says she; and went out with a sad face and a sigh."

He stopped. Then after a pause he said: "You'll excuse me, sir, if I ask for a drink of water. I'm a most tiring you, though, wi' my long story; but I love to think of Meeary Bowes — that's her name, sir — and her kith and kin; for they wur raal kind to me, sir."

Mr. Dale said, "Go into the kitchen and get some refreshment, and return when you are rested."

Mr. Dale was a Yorkshireman; he could follow the broad dialect of Greenwood's story, and was amused with it and his quaint manner of suiting the action to the word. There was a simplicity of narration which fully persuaded him, even if the conviction had not already presented itself, that there was nothing in the man's composition approaching to a spirit of fighting, robbery, or murder, even had he been in robust health, instead

of the emaciated, fever-stricken creature he was ; and that he was utterly incapable of causing the death of an athletic fellow like Will Stokes. The idea was quite preposterous ; Mr. Dale laughed at it to himself as he walked about the room. He agreed with the doctor—it was a perfect farce to imagine such a thing. It would be as likely for a chicken to kill a hawk. “Faugh !” he said, half-aloud ; “the thing is too puerile to think of.” His boy Jeffrey (aged seven years) would have been as capable of doing it. Tut ! it was too ridiculous. Then his mind reverted to his boy—he was strong and active for his age, and fond of manly sports. Had he not trained the child himself ? and taught him to box in order to strengthen nerves which he feared were naturally weak ? He passed in fond review the superior growth and better health of his boy, consequent upon his skilful management and training. The whole picture grew up in his mind—how he had set the child, as early as five years old, before him, standing between his knees, and taught him to box ; desiring the child to hit him as hard as he could, giving only slight pushes in opposition ;

which he insisted on being returned upon himself with the boy's utmost strength. The lad's bodily strength had outgrown the natural oversensitiveness of his mind, and he knew that when he sent him to school he could hold his own with any boy of his age and size. The thought was pleasant to him. He paced up and down the room, waiting for the return of the weaver. Then he considered that beyond hearing the account of his illness, he had better not hear more of his story; that the rest should be reserved for the inquiries at the inquest, which was to take place the next day. So when Greenwood came back, he was permitted to tell his story so far as was sufficient for the present. Mr. Dale asked him how he would like to amuse himself. He said he could help the girls with their spinning, or work in the garden.

"Would you like a book to read?" asked Mr. Dale.

"Nay, sir, I be no good at reading. Abie does the like o' that for us all."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INQUEST.

THE inquest took place in the large room at the "King's Head" inn, where the magistrates held their sittings, where the Courts Leet were held, and other public assemblies met.

The room was greatly crowded.

MARY STOKES, the wife of the murdered man, was first called. She identified the body as that of her husband, William Stokes. She had last seen him on the morning of Monday the 7th of June. He left home that morning about four o' clock, in good health, saying he was going to the monthly market at Ulsford. He did not say with whom he was going. No one was with him when he left home. He was not given to drink. Did not think he was very quarrelsome. Did not know any one he was likely to quarrel with. Did not know any man who owed him a grudge. Could not at all tell how he met with his death. Thought by the look of his face he

was in anger when he died ; had never seen him with such a face on as that ; he looked so fierce as he lay dead. Perhaps that might be the effect of his death ; she did not know any other cause. Did not know anything about sudden death. Thought the blow on the temple must have been a very hard one. She loved him dearly. Why should she not ? He was a good husband to her, and a good father to their children. Could not say but he had known some men who were called poachers. They came to the cottage sometimes, and he went out with them ; they were always good friends when she saw them together. Never heard of quarrelling amongst them. The same money was in his pocket that she had given him before he went out. Knew that he had copper wire and snares, the same as found in his pocket. Had never seen that stick (here the cudgel found by his side was held up) before. He may have cut it in the wood. She did not know. The piece fitting it might have been given him. Could not tell how it came there, nor where it came from. Had got in her possession everything he had about him when he was found, and intended

to keep them. The piece of linen she took from the nail on the stile did not belong to her husband.

CORONER—"Produce it."

She took it from her pocket. "It did not belong to him," she said; "his sleeve was not torn. He had no blood upon him except the small spot on the front of his shirt. I do not know how he got that blood. It was not on his shirt when he left in the morning."

In the midst of sobs and tears, which she had shed from the commencement of her examination, she sat down.

MR. VYAL, surgeon and apothecary at Woodnaston, stated that he had been called to view the body in the Fell meadow, where it had been discovered an hour or more before his arrival. He identified the body as that of William Stokes. There was but little appearance of any scuffle having taken place where the body lay. He had made an examination, and no injury was found on the body, save and except the mark of a blow on the temple inflicted undoubtedly by a fist. A blow on that particular spot would alone

have caused death, which must have been instantaneous. The body was that of a healthy man of great muscular power, and the blow he had received must have been a very severe one. The small spot of blood on the shirt was that of a hare or rabbit, not human blood. There was no blood upon any part of the body, nor was the dress at all disturbed. The blow on the temple was not inflicted by the stick at the man's side; it would have left a different mark. The blow was given before death. The man had been dead three or four hours before he saw the corpse. The expression of the face was peculiarly fierce and savage.

MARY STOKES, re-examined — Said, she did not know the stranger; had never seen him before he was brought into that room. (Much amusement was created by the indignant manner in which she declared)—Her husband “was not so naish that such a puir fackless sneul” as the stranger could have killed him; “it maun be one like to Jack Downes himself, or the Squire, to knock he down; he'd scarce his match in the country for power,” she added with much pride.

THE REV. ALAN DALE, Rector of Woodnaston, said, that Greenwood was brought to his house on Monday the 7th of June, about noon, by Jack Downes, a labourer, accompanied by a crowd of villagers, and was accused of having been found by Jack Downes with the body of the murdered man in the Fell meadow. The stranger had blood flowing from a wound in the head and one on the wrist. He appeared miserably ill, and he (witness) did not consider it likely that, in that state of health, he could have dealt a death-blow to the deceased, who was known to be one of the most powerful men in the neighbourhood. He further stated that he had kept Greenwood at the Rectory ever since he was first brought there, because he was suffering from a relapse of low fever from which he had already been ill, and was not thoroughly strong yet.

JACK DOWNES, labourer at the Holt Farm, stated, that he was coming over the Fell meadow on Monday the 7th of June shortly before noon. He was going into the village on an errand. As he came across the Fell meadow, from the bend of the hill, he saw two men at the bottom of the

slope on the footpath near the palings of Squire Askham's Park.

"Whereabouts?"—"Not many yards from the step-stile over the palings."

"What were they doing?"—"One was lying down with his arms stretched out, without his hat; the other was leaning over him. Witness stood still to watch what they did. He saw the stranger walk round the man who was lying down, and look at his face. He seemed to be examining him. Saw him take up the stick that was lying by the side of the man who was lying in the footpath. Thought the man who was lying down was asleep or in a fit. Saw the stranger put the stick down again in the place where it was lying before; then saw him stoop down again and look at the man's face. Then he looked up, and as soon as he caught sight of the witness he set to and ran away as fast as his legs could carry him."

By a Juryman.—"How was he leaning over the man?"—"He was stooping down with his hands resting on his thighs."

"What did you do when he looked up?"—"I called out, 'Halloa, there! What's to do?' but he didn't stop, but ran off as fast as his legs

could carry him, which wasn't very fast, to the stile into the high road."

"What did you do then?"—"I ran down to look at the man who was asleep, as I thought, but I found that he was certainly dead, and I saw that it was Will Stokes."

"What did you do when you found the man was dead?"—"I ran after the man, Greenwood; he was not very active in getting over the stile. When I got to the stile he was still running along the high road. He looked behind him, still running. He stumbled, and fell on a heap of stones by the road-side. So I overtook him before he had time to get up from his fall, and he looked so pale when I got up to him I thought he was near dead too. His face on one side was covered with blood, which came from a place on his head and amongst the hair, and he was so limp-like when I got him up he could scarce stand or walk. I thought he was shamming, and I thought so all along till I got him to the Rectory. I called at the doctor's, Dr. Vyal, in the village, but he was not at home, and I took him to the Rectory, when Mr. Dale took him in charge."

“Why did you not take him before a magistrate, or give him in charge of a constable?”—
“It did not come into my head to do so, I only thought of the Rector. We all look to the Rector when there’s anything wrong.”

“How did he fall?”—“He tripped up as he looked behind him, and fell with his head on the heap of stones.”

“Where were the stones?”—“At the side of the highway. He came down with a great crash.”

“Did you touch him?”—“Yes, when I got up to him. He was lying all of a heap, with his head on the stones and his hat off.”

“What did you do?”—“I turned him over and saw that his head was cut, and his face too, on that side.”

“Which side?”—“The right side.”

“Was that the side on which he fell?”—
“Yes.”

“What did you see on his face?”—“Blood was running down his face; fresh blood from the wound.”

“Could you see the wound?”—“No; it seemed amongst the hair, and a scratch on his face.”

“Was there any other blood?”—“A sprinkle on the stones where he fell; and I afterwards saw some on his left wrist.”

“How did that come?”—“I do not know; it was dry; and his shirt sleeve was torn.”

“Did you see the stranger touch the body of the man who was lying in the Fell meadow?”—“No; he walked round him and looked at him.”

“When he took up the stick, what did he do with it?”—“He looked at it and turned it about.”

“Did he touch the body with it?”—“No.”

“What did he do after examining the stick?”—“He put it down again.”

“Where did he put it?”—“As near as possible in the same place it was before.”

“Before when?”—“Before he took it up.”

“How long were you watching him?”—“Not more than five minutes.”

“Why did you stand watching him?”—“It was main strange to see them two men there in that way.”

“Did you recognize the body when you went

to look at it?"—"Yes; I couldn't but see it was Will Stokes."

"Was he dead then?"—"Knew he was dead. Could not say how long he had been dead. The face looked uncommon savage. There was a mark on the forehead, on the temple. Knew it was a dangerous place for a hit. Could not say whether the blow was given by the stick or not. Could not say how long ago the blow had been given. Had no way of knowing how long he had been dead."

"What did the stranger say when you got up to him in the road?"—"He said nought; he seemed half-dead himself, or frightened as well as hurt. Thought he might be shamming."

"What did you do with him after you raised him up?"—"I made him walk as well as I could."

"Where did you take him?"—"To the Doctor's."

"Why did you take him there?"—"I went to tell the Doctor to go and look after the body in the Fell meadow."

"What did you do then?"—"The Doctor wasn't come in, so I didn't know what to do,

the villagers crowded and thronged me so ; and I at last took him to the Rector."

"What did the villagers do?"—"They followed in a crowd, and accused me of having been fighting Greenwood."

"What did you do at the Rectory?"—"I left the man with Mr. Dale."

"Did you see him again?"—"No ; not till I saw him in this room."

By the CORONER — "Are you sure that Greenwood is the man you saw in the Fell meadow with the dead body?"—"Yes, quite sure."

"Will you swear it?"—"Yes."

"Did you ever see him before that day?"—"No."

"Did you know who he was?"—"No."

"Had you ever seen him with Will Stokes?"—"No."

"Did you know that Will Stokes had had a quarrel?"—"No."

"Was he a quarrelsome man?"—"Rather, not so very."

"Had you heard that any one had quarrelled with him?"—"Not in partickler."

“Had you seen him in company with any one?”—“Not very lately.”

“Did you often see him?”—“No; not of late; he went t’other way.”

“What other way?”—“Ulsford way.”

“What made him go t’other way?”—“Didn’t know.”

“How did you know he went Ulsford way?”—“Heard say he did.”

“Who by?”—“Them as had seen him.”

“Who had seen him?”—“Tum Cattel.”

“How was it Tum Cattel saw him going on the Ulsford road?”—“He lives by that road.”

By a Juryman—“Had the stranger a stick?”—“No, not that I saw; there was only the stick—club I might call it—that was lying near the body.”

(A stick was produced.) “Is that the stick?”—“Yes; that is the stick that was lying by his side.”

“Are you sure?”—“Yes.”

“Do you know to whom it belonged?”—“No; didn’t know whose stick it was; never saw it before. It looked as if it had been just cut from a holly tree; it was a curious shape. Never

remembered to have seen one like it before. Was sure it would be death to any one; a blow from it would soon settle a man. It might be the best part of a young holly tree. Didn't know what a blow looked like after death. Never saw Will Stokes look so fierce when he was alive. Didn't know who'd been with him. Had not seen any one with him."

"Do you know anything about the bit of stick found in the pocket?"—"Had never seen it till he saw it in this room. It fitted in a remarkable way to the club, even to a notch in the bark. Was sure the small piece was cut from the club."

TOM CATTEL—Said he lived in the lane just off the Ulsford road. Knew Will Stokes. Had met him on the morning of the seventh of June, about six o'clock, walking along the Ulsford road. He was alone. Did not see any stick in his hand. They did not speak; he was walking pretty fast. Had not seen him since.

CORONER—"What took you on that road?"—"I was going to take some milk to my little girl, who is ill. I live near the Ulsford road." Did

not think much about meeting Will Stokes there or at that hour. He was often that road, and at all hours ; had met him early and late. He was mostly alone. Had seen other chaps with him times about, but not of late, as far as he could remember. Knew that Will Stokes did a stroke o' poaching now and again. There's a many poachers about. Some were poachers as didn't ought to be. Will Stokes was partial to shooting and trapping. Did not know, never heard, that he had a quarrel with poachers or any one else. Did not think he was a very quarrelsome fellow. Was always good friends with Will Stokes, but thought he had better mind his business and the Squire's sheep. Will Stokes was that partial to going after game and varmint, he'd spend his whole time at it if he could. Knew Mary Stokes. Seldom saw her ; she lived a long stretch from him. Didn't know who went to their cottage. Knew nothing about the bit of holly found in Will Stokes's pocket. Didn't know it fitted the stick. Had never seen the stick (now held up) before ; thought it was mighty strong, and fit to kill a body.

“Did Will Stokes stop and talk to you on the

road?" — "No; he was walking very fast. Didn't notice anything partickler about him."

JOB TAPSTER of the "Wheatsheaf" public-house, on the Ulsford road, said, he knew Will Stokes well; he often came to his house. Came to his house on Monday morning, the seventh of June. It was just upon the strike of seven o'clock. There was no one in the tap-room when he was there. He had some ale and some bread and cheese, and paid for it. He was not there more than ten minutes. (Mary Stokes in great agitation here rose, and seemed eager to speak.) When Will Stokes went out he called to another man who was going along the road, and they walked away pretty fast together on towards Ulsford. Did not know the man who went with him.

Mary Stokes, with a broken voice, interrupted by sobs, addressed the coroner.

"Please, sir, your worship, Mr. Coroner, that man, Job Tapster, doesn't say true."

"How do you know he does not say true?" asked the coroner.

"Please, your worship, my husband couldn't

have gone to his house and paid for his victuals."

"How do you know?"

"Please, your worship, my husband had all the money I gave him when he went out that morning in his pocket when he was brought here dead."

The coroner asked Job Tapster how Will Stokes had paid him for his ale and bread and cheese. "Was it in the current coin of the realm?"—"He paid me in the way I chose."

"How was that?"—"By barter, to the value of one shilling."

"What barter did he offer?"—"Well, barter is, 'If I give you so and so, you'll give me so and so.'"

"What was the 'so and so' he bartered with you for the ale and bread and cheese?"

Job Tapster turned to Mary Stokes, and said in an undertone, "Ah, you silly woman, you've brought it all on yourself when I say it."

Mary Stokes answered out loud, "You may say what is true."

"Sure it is," answered Job Tapster; then

turning to the coroner, "He gave me leverets for his meat."

Mary Stokes hung down her head.

A JURYMEN—"Was the deceased known as a poacher?"—"No; he was a shepherd at Squire Askham's. But if he saw hares or rabbits about a field he couldn't help going after them."

"Did you know of his associating with poachers?"—"Can't say that I did."

"Have you heard that he had any quarrel with poachers?"—"No."

"Did any one come to your house and speak of having seen him, or been with him, on Monday, after he had been with you?"—"No; it was the monthly market, so few came to my house till evening, and then they talked about the market."

"Did no one mention his name?"—"No one."

"When did you first hear of his death?"—"Jack Downes came to me upon Tuesday, and asked me if I had heard anything about Will Stokes. I said, 'No; what's up about him?'"

"Why did you say, 'What's up about him?'"—"Because I always expected to hear the Squire

had found out his poaching ways, and turned him off."

"What did Jack Downes then say?"—"He told me he had been found murdered in the fell meadow."

"What did you say then?"—"I couldn't say nothing, but I was sorry to hear it; for I was that struck down with astonishment."

"Did he say any more about it?"—"He said they wanted to find out something about it."

"Did he say any more?"—"Yes; he said he had taken up a man on suspicion that he found walking round the body and looking at it in a very uncommon, odd way."

"Did he say he knew the man?"—"No; he said he was a stranger, but thought he was the biggest shammer he'd ever seen—that the Rector was quite taken in with his sham illness. He said the stranger was a tall, strapping fellow, and could knock down any one; but he put on such a meek way before the Rector you'd think he couldn't kill a cat, let alone a fellow like Will Stokes. We wondered what poor Mary would say when she heard it."

"Did you hear any more about it?"—"Yes;

it seemed everybody had some story to tell ; mostly the same, on the whole, but mixed up with what I didn't know whether to believe or not."

"What do you believe now?"—"I believe that if the stranger knocked down Will Stokes he's a much different man from what he looks. Why lors, sir, it would have taken two of me to have touched Will Stokes, he was a most uncommon powerful man.

EAM GREENWOOD then offered himself as a witness, and being duly cautioned, said, "My name is Edmund Greenwood. I am a weaver from Todmorden way."

"Where in Todmorden ; in the town?"—"Todmorden in Yarksheer, your worship. We don't live in the toon, but a-top of the height above the valley out Hebden Bridge way."

"What brought you here?"—"Faither travels with our packs, and I go with him."

"Where is your father?"—"Dinno, your honour."

"You said you travel with your father ; how is it you are not with him?"—"I was left sick

on the moor, and he had to go on to Whitehaven, and had to leave me at a cottage."

"How long is that ago?"—"Oh, your worship, it's main bit ago—above a month."

"What were you doing here?"—"I am going whoam."

"Is this your road home?"—"Mebbee; I'm not so sure."

"When did you first see the murdered man?"—"I never seed he afore."

"Before when?"—"I seed he dead like in the field."

"Did you know his name?"—"Noa."

"Is there any one here whom you know?"—"Yes; there's ta Doctor and ta Parson."

"Do you know Jack Downes?"—"Noa, can't say I do much."

"What do you know of him?"—"That's the name they called he as well-nigh throttled me, as said I'd murdered the dead man in the field."

"Why did he say you had murdered the man?"—"Don't know."

"Was the man alive when you went up to him?"—"Can't say; he looked dead enough."

“ Which way did you come into the field ? ” —
“ Over a stile from t’other side.”

“ Where were you coming from ? ” — “ From Meeary’s.”

“ Who is Mary ? ” — “ Ta woman I lodged wie.”

“ Where does she live ? ” — “ At the moor where I was sick.”

“ Is she a married woman ? ” — “ I s’pose so.”

“ What’s her husband’s name ? ” — “ She ca’s him Jim.”

(The witness’s manner was so droll that laughter could not be suppressed during his examination.)

“ Does any one here know this man and his wife ? ”

MR. DALE — “ Yes, I know them and where they live. I believe them to be very worthy people——”

“ Aye, they be right good,” interrupted Greenwood.

“ They live,” continued Mr. Dale, “ about ten miles from here. Their name is Bowes.”

“ Aye,” again interposed Greenwood; “ Meeary

Bowes, that's it. And Susie, her sister, is a bonnie lass."

CORONER to Greenwood—"How did you get here from the moor?"—"I walked some, and I got a lift in a cart for a good bit, but it shook me terrible."

"What made you come this way?"—"I heard of some races to be on a hill, and I wanted to see races; I've never seen 'em. And some wrestling was to be that I wanted to see."

"When were the races to take place?"—"On the 10th of June, your worship."

"But it was the 7th when you came here. What did you intend to do in the mean time?"—"Please your worship, I'm no so strong to walk since I was sick, and I'd take a main time to walk; for mebbe I couldn't get a lift, and I'm no so mighty thronged just now to be tiring me."

"When you got to the stile in the field, what did you do?"—"I got over it, and, tam the thing! it tore my wrist, and my sark a bit out."

(A torn scrap of linen was shown to him.)

"Is that the bit?"—"Aye, mebbe; where did ye find 'un? Give 'un to me. Aye, weft and

warp the same" (turning the scrap about and examining it); "it's like our make." (The rag was taken from him.) "Ye maun gie me ta dud. Abie will be skreekin' after 'un. Her'll fettle it up again when I get whoam." (Much laughter.)

"Who is Abie?"—"My sister; a right good lass that looks well after ta main chance, I tell 'ee" (with a laugh, and a wink, and a side shake of the head).

At this point the witness was called to order by the Coroner, and the examination continued.

"Why did you run away when you saw another man watching you?"—"Why lors, your honour, it's a main queer thing to be seen near a dead man, so I rin off. T'other man rin after me, and, worse luck, I tiled up ta scoils and shards, and what with the fall and ta wakeness in my legs, I got the fever like back agen. If it hadn't been for ta Parson, God bless him, I'd been murdered too."

"Who was going to murder you?"—"They villagers, your honour, thronged me that close, and the man grippet me that tight, I was well-nigh squoze. I was all in a shiver, and knurled

up; and lors, how my head did ache!" (Laughter.)

By a JURYMEN—"What did you do when you got up to the body; did you touch it?"—"Lors help me! what, touch a dead body? Noa; I looked at he; he was as dead as a dog, I could see, the first minute I looked on he. I couldn't help looking on he, for I never seed such a face on any one; he looked more like a devil nor a man. He must ha' been cursing and swearing foine when he died, surely."

"Why did you walk round the body?"—"I walked round for to take him in, for he looked so strange. And such a cloob as he had beside him I never seed the like."

(A stick was held up.) "Is that it?"—"Aye" (jerking his head on one side), "that's he. We maun keep at a distance from he." (Laughter.)

"Do you know whose stick it is?"—"Noa; 'twas with the dead man."

"Did you touch the stick?"—"Aye, I took it up to look at he; but I put it back again pretty sharp."

CORONER—"That is enough."

Then, addressing the jury, he said, "It is for you to decide from the evidence whether the deceased met his death by manslaughter or murder, and if there is any evidence to fix the guilt upon any individual or individuals; but I think no one can have a doubt in the case."

The jury consulted together for a minute, then the foreman said with one accord they pronounced a verdict of "Manslaughter against some person or persons unknown."

The coroner agreed with their decision, saying that under the circumstances probably the blow which caused death was given in self-defence.

Notwithstanding the gravity of the occasion, the suspected person, as we shall call him for the last time, had occasioned much amusement to those assembled by the *naïveté* and perfect simplicity of his manner, and his humorous way of suiting the action to the word, as in his interview with Mr. Dale. Laughter, often loud, was heard, and the often-repeated order of "Silence" had no effect. Greenwood himself and poor Mary Stokes were the only grave persons. His gravity and unconcern, and unconsciousness of being

“suspected,” or of being the subject of reproach in any way, highly diverted the villagers. It was “as good as a play,” they said, and he left the court with all hearts turned to him.

CHAPTER XIV.

MOTHER PENDLE.

MR. ASKHAM was sitting in the library, being, as he pronounced himself, "quite well," though he could not yet use his left arm, nor rise from his chair freely through the stiffness of his right knee. His illness had put back his usual occupations, whilst the inquest on the body of Will Stokes seemed to take up his whole thoughts. He was impatient for news, wanted to know everything that passed to the most minute details, was much distressed he could not attend the inquest. "Poor Mary, poor Mary," he continually said. With his usual generosity, he sent money to her, that she might not want the necessaries of life, and desired to pay for the funeral.

He was sitting in his library, looking over the papers and letters which had accumulated during his illness. The letter of the most recent date

was from a gentleman in the neighbourhood asking for the cottage formerly occupied by "Mother Pendle," as a residence for one of his men. Mr. Askham had quite forgotten all about this cottage, and that it had remained locked up ever since the old woman was found dead in the snow. His steward had brought him the key, and it had been put away in a drawer in his secretary. He now remembered having desired the man to allow nothing to be touched in the cottage, to lock it up, and bring him the key. The steward told him it would be safe, for there was such a dread of the late inmate as a "witch," that no one would go near it; the villagers in passing that way preferred to go some little distance round.

Whilst thus reflecting he found the door-key labelled "key of the (Pendle) cottage on the common," and almost immediately heard a knock at the door, and before he could turn round or speak it was opened wide, and Mary Stokes appeared. She curtsied and said, "I beg pardon, sir, for taking the liberty of coming in this way; but Mr. Thwaites (the butler) and John told me you couldn't see nobody; and I knew you

would see me, for I am so unhappy," she added, sobbing and crying.

"Come in, Mary, and tell me what is the matter."

"You know, sir, as poor Will is dead," she said, weeping, with the corner of her apron to her eyes, "though, sir, you were ill yourself and didn't know much about it. And, sir, I'm come to thank you for your kindness to me and to him as is gone, and to ask if you would please let me stay on a little longer at the cottage, till so be as I can find summat to do, or me and my bairns will all starve." (Sobs.)

"Yes, Mary, you may stay at the cottage as long as you like, if it is not too lonely for you."

"Nay, sir, it's no lonesome, for I've lived there all my married life, and everything minds me of poor Will. Please, sir, how long may I stay; and could you tell me at a' what I could do to get a living?"

"As I said, Mary, you can stay there as long as you like."

"Aye, sir, but, saving your presence, it's nae good for me to hang on that saying, for if so be I can't get a living, I canna pay my rent."

“You shall have it rent free, if you like to remain there.”

“Oh, sir,” she said, making a curtsy, “you’re very good, as all the country says. It’s helping the widow and fatherless. But, sir, can’t I do summat for you, sir. I can tend the poultry, I be used to that. And I can spin.”

“Well, Mary, suppose I have a place made for you to keep poultry; and do you think you could rear a few partridges and pheasants for me?”

“I’ve no been used to that work, but I can learn, and it’s the blessing of God, sir, you’ll have for your goodness to me and the childer.”

“Then I shall come up to your cottage to-morrow if possible, and see what can be done, and——”

The door opened and Thwaites entered, saying, “Please, sir, Farmer Giles wants to see you.”

“Tell him to come in;” then, turning to Mary Stokes, he said, “Now go home, behave as well as you have always done, and be sure you shall not want when I can help you.”

“Oh, thank you, sir,” she said, sobbing and curtsying, and left the room.

“ Well, Farmer Giles, and how are you ? ”

“ Sprightly, thank you, sir, and I’m real glad to see you about again. Many’s the time I’ve come up to see after you whiles you be laid up, and you’ve had a turn sure enough, but I hope you be smart agen.”

“ Yes, thank you, Giles, I am quite recovered.” But when turning to reach a chair, the Squire exclaimed, “ Oh ! ”

“ I’m sorry to hear that, sir ; I’m afraid you’re not quite strong yet.”

“ It is my left shoulder that still pains me a little, but I shall soon get over that.”

“ I hope so too, sir. Please, sir, I made bold to come and ask you about ‘ Mother Pendle’s cottage,’ as they call it.”

“ Ah, I have had a letter asking me about that cottage.”

“ I thought, maybe, you’d have one from Mr. Sturt, as wants it for one of his men. And the reason I come to you, sir, it is, begging your pardon, sir, that I take it,” here he lowered his voice, “ there must be summat more there than we knows of ; she was such a cranky old soul. And I thought, sir, mebbe you don’t know

about her so well as I do, and I wud just come and say to you ” (his voice sinking to a confidential whisper) “ as I wouldn’t let no one but yourself go in there, and rout and rummage about, if I was you, sir.”

“ What do you suppose there may be in the cottage ? ”

“ Well, sir, you see,” he answered, still in an undertone, “ she was curous like. My wife and I used to call her a mazed woman sometimes. But whatever she was, she wur quite safe,” he said, laughing ; “ she had a fay’s life with her. No one would go near her, or touch any of her duds or goods without her knowing, for fear of the devil,” he said, with a good laugh. “ Devil or no devil, she was a good old soul ; but, sir, her ways wur pertickler. She never wanted for money,” he said, once more in a low tone of voice, “ and she often had goolden guineas and half-guineas when other people hadn’t ha’pence. And they said she got ’un from the devil. Now, sir, where did they goolden guineas come from ? It’s my notion there’s a many o’ they hidden about in old crocks or stockings aboon the house, and, sir, I should

like you to go yourself and look after 'un."

"That I certainly will do, Giles ; and why not come with me ? "

"Surely, at your bidding, sir. I take it we'll find some curious things there, in old stockings and the like ; and whensoever you please to go, sir, you please let me know and I'll be ready."

"There's no time like the present, so if you will go and get some dinner in the hall, we will start in an hour's time."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Giles, and was leaving the room when Mr. Askham said—

"Oh, stop. How did you come here ? "

"I come in my shay-cart, sir ; would you please to take a seat in it ? "

"Well, yes, I should prefer it, as my arm is not fit yet for driving, and we can have some conversation on the road."

"Very well, sir, then I'll be ready," and he left the room.

The interview with Mary Stokes had rather upset Mr. Askham, and when he went into his wife's sitting-room (the word "boudoir" had not yet been introduced from France) she re-

marked that he looked tired and pale, and must have some rest. He told her of his proposed expedition with Farmer Giles, and she said she should like to accompany them. He begged her to follow them if she liked, but that he and the farmer must go first.

Accordingly, when in due time Giles drove up to the front door in his "shay-cart," Mr. Askham got in and they drove off.

"Now, Giles," said Mr. Askham, "I want you to tell me about poor old 'Mother Pendle.' What do you know of her history?"

"I can't say, sir, I know much of her history, but I have heard some of her ways, and seen some; and I think she would 'a trusted me more nor some others, me and my wife; we used to speak kindly wi' her, and she wi' we, but I never axed her any questions about herself."

"How did she get her living?"

"I can't pretend to say, sir. My wife and me, we used to be sore troubled to think how she lived. You see, sir, she wasn't like a most poor folks; she didn't speak like we; she must ha' come from London way or far, for she spoke gentlefolks' talk, and could read and write fine;

and lors, sir, she wur as good as a book if you wanted to know anything."

"But yet she was said to swear at the boys; that is not gentlefolks' talk. Eh, Giles?"

"Lor, sir, so they said; but I never heard of her saying any more than 'Oh, you're bad boys, you neither fear God nor devil;' and I don't know if she even said that much."

"She spoke with some truth of some of them, I believe; but it cannot be called swearing."

"No, sir, I don't believe as how she ever did. She used to turn round and shake her stick at 'em, and scream out loud to them 'You bad boys,' and if they were pertickler wicked she'd take up a stick or stone to throw at them, so they said, but I never seed her do it; then they all ran away as fast as they could, for they said 'Old Nick' was in her, and called her 'a witch.' Then you see, sir, her dress puzzled 'em, for she wore the clo'es of half the last century back; she wur rale old-ferrand and never very shabby neither. I dare say, sir, you mind her dress—the large black satin bonnet, all twiddled and turned wi' ribbin and stuff, and lace hanging down in front—my wife says rale good rare lace; and her

scarlet cloth cloak with a great hood ; and in bad weather she put it over her bonnet, and ” (laughing) “ all so much too big for the little old woman ; she did look old-ferrand ! and you’d expect to see her lifted up by the wind by her bonnet and carried off. Then her other duds wur never like nobody else’s—so curous with what my wife calls ‘quiltens,’ and ‘plackets,’ and ‘kirtles,’ and the Lord knows what ; and great flowers all over ’em with the kirtles looped up like. Lor, she wur a sight ! and all so clean and tidy-like. She’d walk so clean in the dirtiest weather, you’d scarce see a bit of mud on her clogs ; and that’s another reason why they boys said she wur a witch. They used to cry out as they saw her pass, ‘ Ah, the devil takes care of his own,’ and declare she rode on her stick to get out o’ the mud. But lor, sir, any tidy woman can keep from the mud if she’s a mind to it ; so does my wife, and I’m sure she’s no witch,” he said, laughing.

“ Yes, I had remarked how clean she always looked, and how daintily she walked along.”

“ Dainty ! Aye, sir, that’s the word for her. My wife’s seen her hard at it, washen, and

scrubben, and sweepen, and flat-ironen, as busy as any one, and her place as clean ! not a speck of dirt ; you might eat off the floor."

"What age do you suppose she was?"

"Not far from seventy I should say, sir, mebbe more ; her face was very puckered when you see her near ; she'd no teeth reg'lar, just a few here and there, as far as one could see ; and her hands so small and thin, a most like birds' claws ; but she'd her sight right good, and no fault in her hearing ; she wur better off than a many half her age for that."

"Did you see much of her?"

"No, sir, nobody seed much of her ; she kep to herself, and never went flaunting after nobody ; but to childer of any age she'd be right good and kind. She wur very fond of baking what she called "Parkins," a sort of coarse gingerbread, and the childer often came back from her cottage with a big flat cake of it, or a bit of one, she'd give 'em."

"Did she deal with the people in the village?"

"Yes, sir, for some things ; but she often went over to Ulsford with the carrier for things she

wanted. But she'd some, as I know, she couldn't get there."

"What things were they?"

"Why lor, sir, them bonnets and things!"

"Do you know anything about her money?"

"No, sir, I never heard about her money; she seemed to have a plenty of it, and goolden guineas wur never wanting with her. Sometimes she'd have one pound notes for a time, and then she'd take to her guineas again, so I heard people say."

"Her rent she always paid me most punctually," said Mr. Askham, "but it never amounted to gold; and I have often noticed the graceful curtsey she made when she entered the audit-room, and her somewhat stately walk, notwithstanding her common wooden clogs."

"Aye, sir, stately she wur, though she be but a wee bit burdie; and my wife says she's more of a lady than many as holds their heads high, poor as she be. Some is born ladies even in a cottage, and their forbears ain't much. But about her money I knows nuthen. She went away sometimes for a day or so, and I've seen her riding on the carrier's cart on the Ulsford

road, as I said just now; and I know she went to the town sometimes, for I've seen her there, but always alone and trudging along, picking her way in dirty weather in her wooden clogs, with that pertickler large bonnet on. Well, sir, here we are," he said, as they drove up to the cottage. "I can tie up my horse to the door at the back. Have you got the key, sir?"

"Yes. Help me down, Giles, for I am rather stiff. Ah!—that's right. Don't touch my left arm—I shall be able to walk in a minute."

"Why sure, sir, you are stiffish. It's my shay as is narrow and high for you. I wish it were better, sir; I don't like to see you like that. Please to lean on me, sir. We shall find a chair in the house of some sort. Shall I take the key, sir?"

"Yes, Giles, and let me lean on you; I thought all stiffness was gone. It will go off in a minute. Let us go in; I should not like Mrs. Askham to see me limping in this way."

"Woh, oss," said Giles; "old Dobbin will stay quiet till I come back.—Now, sir, you hold on till I unlock the door.—It's uncommon hard rusted like in the lock.—I'll try again.—Well, it

be hard surely ; I'm a most afeered I shall break the key.—Ah, there it is.—Now, sir, let me give 'un a push—there.—Now, sir, hold on a bit till I get a chair for ye.—Why lors a mercy ! there's the kittle on the hook, as if the puir ole soul was coming back to supper.—Now look, sir, see how neat and clean it is, though it's so many months since she left this.”

“ The door-key was the only one found in her pocket ; we must look about for some others, Giles ; but do not be too hasty, or touch anything in a drawer or a cupboard till I have seen it.”

When Mr. Askham was somewhat recovered they searched about. Implements for needle-work and knitting were found in a table-drawer, but no keys ; a chest of apparel was to be left for Mrs. Askham to look over. The cupboard held crockery and mouldy eatables. A small tub of what was once meal, a small crock of what was supposed to have been butter—all in a state of decomposition—were quickly put on one side. They examined the rooms front and back for more cupboards, but found none. At last Giles said, “ We hav'n't looked in the bed.”

It was a cupboard bedstead, and as the farmer opened it he let the foot which was turned up fall suddenly. A chink was heard, as a small bunch of keys fell on the floor, three or four tied together with a piece of string.

“ We’ve got ’em,” said the farmer ; “ but where do they ’long to ? I don’t see no boxes ; do you, sir ? ”

“ We shall find them somewhere. But here comes Mrs. Askham ; she will help us.”

CHAPTER XV.

AT THE COTTAGE.

MRS. ASKHAM had driven up in her pony-carriage, across the common, and was rather later than she intended to be, having been stopped by one of the villagers. When she got to the cottage her first question was—

“Have you found anything, George?”

“Yes; but I want you to come and help amongst these women’s concerns.”

She set to work immediately unpacking the chest of apparel. The modest wardrobe had nothing to recommend it to notice, except its cleanliness and good condition.

“There must be more than this,” she said, after replacing the things in the box. “Are you sure you looked over the bed sufficiently?”

“You had better come and look yourself, my dear. You may understand it better than we do; and whilst you are doing that, Farmer Giles and I will search in the back kitchen.”

Mrs. Askham liked the little excitement of hunting for hidden treasures in this eccentric old woman's house. She undertook the task with a good will ; and after some little time, and the thorough examination of the bed, she cried out, " George, George, come quickly. Farmer Giles, come."

Farmer Giles was the first to arrive and assist her in holding up the mattress.

" Will you hold that up whilst I put my hand into this hole?" And out of a hole in the straw she pulled several small bags, and one of larger size, heavy, and evidently containing treasure of some sort.

" Wait," she said ; " don't be in a hurry. Don't open them till I have found all. See here. What a nice little box ! I believe it is clamped with silver ; and something is engraved on the top plate. Why, certainly—yes—it must be—a coronet !—but is so dusty and dirty from being in here I can scarcely tell what it is. Do look at it, George."

Mr. Askham rubbed it with his glove, and saw that it was a coronet.

" I'm not surprised," said Farmer Giles.

“We were saying, sir, what a lady she looked.”

“We shall find more yet, Louisa,” said Mr. Askham to his wife; “search on.”

“I cannot find anything more in the mattress. Pull it away; there is a sort of well under it.”

Farmer Giles pulled away the mattress, and in doing so out rolled various little jingling parcels.

“Holloa! what’s these, my lady?” said the farmer.

“Oh, never mind them. Put them aside till we have looked here. George, come and help me.”

“I cannot, my love; Farmer Giles will help you. What do you want?”

“Oh, I want,” said Mrs. Askham, buried in the recess,—“I want some one to help me move these heavy things,—boxes, books, all sorts of things.”

“Please, my lady, to let me come in a bit,” said the farmer.

“Now take care,” she said; “we don’t know what there may be in that box. I expect all sorts of treasures after that coronet, George.

Oh, wait till I have done. Please not to open those packets till I have finished here ; I am so anxious to see all they contain."

"I think I can help with that box," said Mr. Askham.

"It's mighty shaky, sir, but not so heavy. Take a hold here, sir."

Mr. Askham took hold of the corner presented to him. "Ah-h," screamed Mrs. Askham, as the box came to pieces, and out flew a little Chinese figure of a man, making hideous grimaces, and working his arms about, whilst after him came another, with a whirring noise. They both ran on wheels, the former in nearly a straight line, and still went on whirring when stopped by the wall. The last one ran two or three times in a largish circle, and then stopped, still opening and shutting its mouth like the other one, and whirling a tiny sword round its head.

"Well," said Farmer Giles, with a good laugh, when his astonishment was a little over, "well, these be curous chaps! The boys might well speak of the devil if they'd seen they! Did you ever see the like, my lady?"

“Oh yes, we have some; they are Chinese toys. But they did make me start, jumping out in that unexpected way.”

“Ha, ha, ha,” laughed the farmer, and he stood over the little figures, saying, “Ye be outrageous chaps, wherever ye come from. Ha, ha, ha! I never seed the like o’ ye before. I daren’t touch ye though, or ye’ll be off agen I expecks. Ha, ha, ha;” he was so diverted he could not stop laughing.

“We must find the keys for them.”

“The keys, my lady?”

“Yes; they are wound up like clock-work. How pleased the children would be with them, George.”

“We shall find some written history of them, most likely,” said Mr. Askham. “A person of her habits of order could not omit making some memorandums of her curiosities.”

Mrs. Askham took her place again at the well. “Here’s another box like the last one, but it is heavier. Now take care, Giles, or it will fall to pieces perhaps.”

“Nay, my lady, this be a stronger box. But it has a smell of summat in a doctor’s shop. Pah!—I don’t care for that smell.”

"It is camphor," said Mrs. Askham.

"Camphor, my lady?"

"Yes; it is made of camphor wood."

They drew up the lid, which was at the side of the box (the former box opened in the same way), and amongst many papers was drawn forth a square box containing another Chinese toy, a mandarin on horseback. Three clumsy watch-like keys were also in this box; they were without wards, very short in the shafts, terminating in square heads of an open pattern, and were apparently made of brass.

"This chap be content to stay at whoam," said the farmer; "but mebbe ye can rin as fast as t'others if it pleases ye. Ye furrin Mounseer," he said, stooping over and addressing the toy, "ye're a trifle ainshunt I take it, flaunted up that fashion, and ye're horse too, ha, ha, ha."

"George, take this," said Mrs. Askham, handing her husband a square box covered with green and gold silk.

He opened it. "What a beautiful vase," he said, taking it out. It was a gilt filigree vase lined with silver, a red and green dragon enamelled on the top, and enamelled flowers and

leaves on the sides. The vase when opened was found to be intended for an inkstand, and stood about six inches high.

“Indeed this is a rare piece of art,” said Mr. Askham.

“Oh, how exquisite!” said his wife. “So this is its case,” taking up the case fitting exactly to it, also in Chinese work. “See, it is lined with silk; and oh, George! here is some writing.” She took out from the bottom a small faded paper, the ink scarcely legible; but yet they could read the firm writing, which was, “To Ann, from her uncle and godfather.”

“There must be some history attached to all these valuable curiosities,” said Mr. Askham.

“More things, George; open them carefully,” and she handed him some roundish lumps of paper.

“Too-ads!” shouted the farmer, when they were unfolded. “Too-ads! by goll! saving your presence, sir, and my lady,” with a bow; “but I am right doited by all they. Too-ads! too-ads!! to think of her having such ugly beasts! wi’ graat wide open mouths! and I never seed such big ’uns!”

“They are not very pretty, but they are curious and valuable, Louisa,” said Mr. Askham, turning to his wife. “They are the finest old china.”

“Well, who’d think of making such things! They Mounseers be curious chaps” (“Mounseers” being with Farmer Giles, and in fact with most of the common people in the time of the French wars, the general name for all who were not English).

There were other valuables in the camphor box; such as nests of pierced and carved ivory balls, with long tassels of crimson silk, enamelled cups and saucers, teapots, basins, covered cups, and small bronze vases, all so carefully enveloped in soft Chinese silk paper, they might have travelled “to the end of the world” without being injured. Lastly there was a long narrow box opening at its side. Mrs. Askham carefully drew out from it an ivory pagoda, most elaborately carved in relief with innumerable figures; in every part quite perfect, not even a little corner bell missing or out of place; the case lined with silk exactly fitted it.

“Oh, George, look here! How exquisitely

beautiful ! It is even better than ours, which is so much admired. Where could she have got all these things ? ”

“ P'r'aps she was a lady's maid, my lady,” said the farmer. “ They do get handsome things from their mississes.”

“ Well, Giles,” said Mr. Askham, “ this suggestion is indeed a falling off from your former idea of ‘ a duchess.’ ”

“ A duchess ? ” said Mrs. Askham, laughing.

“ Yes, my lady, so I said ; for she had the ways of gentlefolks about her uncommon.”

“ Now, George,” said Mrs. Askham, “ I have emptied this part of the coffer.”

“ Coffer, my dear ! ”

“ I don't know what else to call it. On the other side of the division there seem to be books ; and really there is such a strong smell of mice it makes me feel quite sick. I do not think I can stay here any longer. Farmer Giles, will you lift out these heavy parcels for me ? ”

“ I'm at your bidding, my lady.”

“ Then please take my place for a little while.”

He soon handed out large parcels of books,

and at the further end came upon a very heavy box clamped with iron.

“I don’t know as I can lift this ’ere box all by myself,” said he; “and how that little frail woman got these heavy things in here I can’t have a notion. To be sure she wur younger ten years or more ago.”

“She put the boxes in, and then filled them, probably,” said Mr. Askham.

“Lor, sir, but that could na’ be, for the lock of this heaviest one is to the side of the chest, and there’s no room to turn it round.”

“Let me help you,” said Mrs. Askham.

“It would break your arms, my lady.”

“I am strong enough you will see. Let us both take hold of that handle at the top, and if the box comes to pieces it will not signify.”

In this manner, with great trouble, the box was extricated from its narrow resting-place. It was very old-fashioned, and looked like a plate-chest, and was fastened with a padlock to a bar which reached across it.

“We may find the key in the bunch that fell out of the mattress, George.”

“There is no padlock key here,” said Mr.

Askham, looking them over. "But here is a most peculiar bunch of keys, perhaps one may fit in some place."

The bar and lock were much ornamented, pierced here and there with holes. Mr. Askham examined them minutely, and at last put a key which had no wards into a hole that looked deeper than the rest; it would not turn, but on pushing it back with some force to get the chest more to the light, up flew the bar; a lock was perceived under the hinge of the bar. He took out the key, but it would not fit the other lock.

"Can you not open it, George?"

"I will try one of the other keys. I may find one for this lock too."

The right key was quickly found, and the bar was released on that side. The padlock proved to be merely a deception, the ring fastening with a bolt to the box; this unbolted, the bar opened to another hinge at the further end, where another key, different again from the former, was found to unlock the bar, which could then be taken off; beneath the ornamental part lower down a fourth key-hole was disclosed.

“These mysteries are endless,” said Mrs. Askham. “Try the fourth key, George.”

The locks were good, and the key turned well, but did not seem to open any part of the box.

“No doubt it is for some purpose, though we cannot find it yet. Do unpack it, George. I want so much to see what is carefully locked up in this casket.”

Mr. Askham opened the box, and underneath various papers he came upon some beautifully chased silver plate. A tea and coffee service of ancient form, small in size, as they were made in olden time. He lifted up the tray in which they fitted, and underneath were two chased gold or gilt goblets, and two *repoussé* bowls, also gold or gilt, one fitting in the other, so that they would make a covered cup if necessary, the larger one having two handles. A large brass button was seen on this tray near the front of the chest; Mr. Askham took hold of it and pulled it up, and so left it. He tipped up the box from the back to alter its position, and he saw the underpart of the front separating; he took hold of an ornamental knob on the separating part and

pulled out a drawer full of spoons and forks of silver, and some beautifully chased gilt teaspoons. On the top of these lay, neatly folded, a time-soiled paper.

“Look at that paper, George,” said Mrs. Askham; “perhaps it may tell something.”

He unfolded it, and on a small piece of parchment was written—“For my dearest Ann, from her uncle and godfather.”

“Oh, what a nice ‘uncle and godfather’ to have,” said Mrs. Askham. “I wonder who they all were. Oh, if she were but here to tell us!”

“As long as she was here, my love, we should have known nothing at all about these things.”

“George, they must not stay here. Had you not better take them home with you and keep them? What shall we do? I am so glad, Farmer Giles, you are here with us. I should not like to have found all these valuables without a witness.”

“You’re very good, my lady,” was all the farmer could say, for he was completely overpowered with the sight of such riches.

It was then arranged that Thomas the groom,

who was outside, should be despatched to bring a cart with some boxes and packing-cases, and in particular a large thick wrapper that was in the hall.

“It is to cover the packages I shall take back with me,” Mrs. Askham explained; “I cannot pack all the parcels as closely as the good old woman packed them. And I think the most choice should go with us. Some can be put into Farmer Giles’s cart, can they not?”

“Yes; you are right about taking the most valuable with us. What shall we do with them when we get them home?”

“Cannot the best things be placed in the light closet out of the library? They will be under your own eye, George, and within reach. But I suppose they must be advertised.”

“We shall probably find letters or memorandums somewhere; though no written document was to be found when I searched at the time of her death. But then of course we had not pulled the place to pieces, as we have done now.”

Farmer Giles would not be left alone in the

cottage when the others had left the kitchen. He said he would go and look after "Dobbin," for he "wouldn't be left alone with they things for no money; they were too grand a'most for the king."

"But," said Mr. Askham, "you will not object to taking some of them with us, as you take me home."

"Oh no, sir; you'll be there too."

"I do not think it is safe to have such treasures any longer here, and I shall take them home, and keep them locked up till I can find who is their proper owner."

"Who will ye 'wertiss for, sir?"

"That I must find out. But come and help Mrs. Askham and me to pack up these things again."

"Lor, sir, I should be right down afeared to touch one on 'em; and as to they rampagious chaps, a running about, I wouldn't touch 'em with a pair of tongs," he said, laughing.

"Never mind them; come and help us."

They found Mrs. Askham on her knees rolling up the "too-ads" in their papers.

“Oh, George,” she exclaimed, “I have found some more keys; but where are the boxes?”

“We shall find them in good time. I want to look more about the place before I leave; we must sound the walls.”

The fireplace in the front kitchen took up nearly the whole of one side; the hearth was a large flat stone, raised about six inches above the red brick floor. Turf was burnt, and was piled up on the stone; the favourite “ingle” was on each side with a stone seat. The cooking was managed by hanging pots or kettles on a large hook hanging over the fire, and baking was effected on a griddle, also suspended; or by clearing a place on the hearth and placing over the baking a beehive-shaped earthen cover. Behind the “ingle” on each side were wooden panels. Mr. Askham tapped these, and found both to sound hollow. One was easily opened, and showed that it was often used. In it he found various implements for household use, and a large Bible, very much dilapidated, the title-page and many leaves torn out, but no writing whatever upon it. The panel on the other side was not

so easily opened. It was not until he had expended both time and patience, and had broken his penknife, that he managed it. There was a button to keep it shut, and a small piece of string hung from the door, but it was so rotted by damp that it broke off in his hand, and the hot season was not far enough advanced to loosen the door, which was swollen with damp. However, he succeeded at last, and found in it a variety of boxes, chiefly small ones, the largest being of mahogany edged with brass ; an old red morocco workbox clamped with a yellow-looking metal, lock, and claws for feet ; an equally old red morocco writing-case ; some paper parcels, a few books, and a small clock-case without the clock. All were sadly mildewed ; the books were in a very bad state, and there was a most unpleasant smell, which, on examining the bottom of the cupboard, came from the dead body of a cat, now almost shapeless. No doubt it had been shut up before the old woman went for her last walk, and so had been starved to death.

“ Oh dear, how tired I am,” exclaimed Mrs. Askham. “ I wish the carriage would come.”

"I do not wonder at it, my love," replied her husband, looking at his watch. "I declare we have been here four hours! Fortunately I hear the pony carriage returning."

Almost as he spoke, the vehicle drew up at the cottage door. Thomas jumped out immediately, and brought from under the seat a basket packed with a clean cloth over it.

"Please, sir," he said to his master, "Mrs. Cubberd kept me back till she had got this basket ready. She thinks you and my missis will be clemmed being here so long. Shall I unpack it, sir?"

"Yes, by all means; and I am very glad she thought of it. There, stay where you are—now bring a table and chair out here in the shade, and make haste to set the table out." Then, calling to Mrs. Askham, "Louisa, come out, here is some refreshment for you. Farmer Giles and I will also have some."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said the farmer; "I shall be right glad of summat."

Mrs. Askham soon revived after the rest and collation in the cool evening air. Then they began to pack the vehicles, which took some

time, it being past seven o'clock before they were ready to go home.

As Mrs. Askham was driving away, she stopped and said, "George, do get me some of those beautiful white roses. How pretty they are."

Farmer Giles ran with his knife to Mr. Askham. "Take my knife, sir; they'll scratch your hands. Ah, them were her favourites. When my wife offered her some red ones, times agone, she said, 'Ah, no, give me some white ones. White roses for me,' she said."

"Did your wife know her well?"

"The old lady came up to our house sometimes for eggs, or butter, or sometimes milk; and if we'd any honey she liked it."

Mr. Askham carried the roses to his wife and she drove off. He then said to the carter, "You will have to be here to-morrow morning by ten o'clock for the rest of the things; and as you go through the village call at Ladds', the bricklayer, and tell him to come up here to meet me at eleven o'clock. Take all you have got in the cart to the Hall."

Mr. Askham locked up the cottage and got

into Farmer Giles's "shay," which was also packed, for there was room for very few things in the pony carriage.

As they drove over the common, Giles said to him, "Do you see that, sir?"

"What?"

"That glint on the cottage windows."

"Yes; that is merely the reflection of the setting sun on the glass."

"Well, sir, when you were at York last year, such a 'flection as that made a great rackle in the village. They boys saw it after the rain had washed the windows clean, and they swore the poor old lady was back again, and had got a great fire and candles burning, and it was not her at all that was buried. So they left their games and set off to the churchyard to tear up her grave, hooting all the way, and kicking up such a stour. They thought they'd be obliged to have the constables out after 'em. But Mr. Dale heard the riot, and threatened they should all have a good hiding if they didn't go home and keep the peace. So we heard no more about it, kicking up such a rackle! it was shameful!"

“The young blackguards !” said Mr. Askham.

“Varmints, I call ’em, sir. And to think how that puir old soul must ha’ been set upon by ’em.” Then, after a pause, he added, “To be sure, sir, them grand things of hern has quite dazed me. I think, sir, we’d better not say noth’en about ’em. Some of they daring chaps might be grubbing up round the house for treasure. We have heard of such things.”

“You are right, Giles. If your wife can keep a secret——”

“Ah, that she can, sir,” said he, interrupting.

“If she can keep a secret, you might tell her, as she has taken such an interest in the old lady; but do not talk about it to other people. It will be known soon enough when I have advertised for the lawful possessors or inheritors.”

“They be gentlefolks, or I’ll be throttled.”

“No doubt about it; but who they are I cannot imagine. It is a perfect mystery.”

“Aye, and a masterpiece too, sir,” said the farmer, looking grave and conscious, as though he had found the crowning epithet for what was so incomprehensible to him.

“I told you, sir,” he continued, after a pause,

“how my wife used to dust the chair for the old lady to sit upon when she came to our house, the same as she did for my lady, or any other of the gentlefolk. Well, sir, my wife used to say she never could take the liberty to sit down when the old lady was there, so she stood and fettled about the things all the time, not to make the old lady feel uneasy. And see, sir, though she didn’t know it, she was right. I’m sarten she was right, after all them gewgaws and things. The women has a mighty power of sight of things; they beats us men. Women can see in a minute who’s who. To think of her rubbing up those chairs for the old lady to sit upon! It’s curous, isn’t it, sir? Lors, how my wife will stare when I tell her all this. She’ll be quite doited like about it.”

Mr. Askham was amused at the farmer’s speech. He never required or waited for an answer to his queries, but talked over the former stories about “Mother Pendle,” whom after this visit to the cottage he never called by any other name than “the old lady,” or “the old madam.” He seemed as though he could not give sufficient expression to his astonishment, and

was quite prepared to find that she was of any rank short of the Royal family ; even perhaps the “ Princess in disguise,” which Mr. Askham had laughingly suggested some time before, as a solution of the secret of her grace and accomplishments, which the farmer extolled so enthusiastically.

“ What say you now, Giles ? Is it to be the ‘ Princess in disguise,’ or the ‘ lady’s maid,’ eh ? ”

“ Oh, sir, begging her pardon for saying that, it’s more like to be the Princess.”

CHAPTER XVI.

AGAIN AT THE COTTAGE.

THE next day, punctually to the time appointed, Mr. Askham and Farmer Giles, who said he could spare a couple of hours, or till noon if necessary, arrived at the cottage. The back kitchen was to be thoroughly searched. It did not look very inviting; the damp and the dust, which naturally collect in such circumstances, gave a dingy, mouldy look to the few cloths, pots, pans, and wooden utensils. These were taken out into the small yard by the farmer, to be packed in the cart as soon as it arrived. A cupboard was found; it contained a strongly-bound chest, which was put into the cart; it was heavy. Another smaller chest was even heavier. The few chairs, the table, and the shut-up bedstead were also put into the cart, and the cottage stood empty. All the keys that did not belong to the house Mr. Askham put in his pocket.

The cart was sent off, and Mr. Askham and

the farmer were waiting for the bricklayer, when who should ride up but Mr. Royle. The farmer was standing by himself at the door when he appeared.

“Oh, how d’ye do, Farmer Giles,” he said. “What are you about here? dismantling the cottage, eh?”

“There are some repairs wanting, sir, I believe.”

“You were here yesterday—— Woh, horse, be quiet.”

But the horse had a queer temper, like his master, and would not be quiet, but kept backing and trying to turn round, till it stepped on the white rose tree and broke it down.

“Holloa! what the deuce is that?” said Mr. Royle, on hearing the crackling noise of the breaking bush. “No harm done I hope.”

“You’ve broken the poor old lady’s rose tree. Dear! dear! My lady is fond of that rose.”

“Woh! then. Can’t you be quiet?” Mr. Royle said to his horse, which was still tramping about the rose bush, not liking the thorns which scratched its legs.

But at last the horse moved off with a bound, almost upsetting Mr. Royle, but he recovered himself, and the horse stood fretting and champing the bit either in fright or rage.

“What is the matter?” said Mr. Askham, as he came round the cottage.

Mr. Royle explained the accident.

“I am sorry it is so destroyed; my wife will be very vexed. We must see what can be done with what is left.”

“The root is not hurt I hope. I am glad to see you look so well, Askham, after your accident, which I am afraid was a bad one.”

“Not so bad as was at first thought, I believe, but I am quite recovered.”

“I hope you and Mrs. Royle are coming to our school examination,” continued Mr. Askham. “Rule has got some of the boys on exceedingly well. Afterwards perhaps you will come up to the Hall to luncheon. It is rather an early meeting, but that cannot be avoided.”

“Thank you, we shall attend with pleasure,” said Mr. Royle, in an uncertain tone of voice; “but do you ask me to come alone to the Hall?”

“No ; I meant both you and Mrs. Royle,” said Mr. Askham, smiling.

“Your terms are so ambiguous there’s no knowing what you mean. I dare say she will be pleased to come too.”

“I did not intend to be ambiguous, believe me.”

“Are you going to pull this cottage down, or what are you going to do ? ”

“Some repairs are necessarily wanted, and I have removed all poor old Mother Pendle’s furniture to the Hall till I can find a lawful inheritor.”

“I should think her lawful inheritors or her lawful relatives would be hard to find, except among the gypsies or tramps.”

“Whoever they are, they must be found, or advertised for, for I do not know what else to do with her chattels.”

“Make a bonfire of the old rubbish, and save the chance of fever from those who might lay claim to them.”

“I have no right to destroy what does not belong to me ; and as to fever, that would be impossible, I should say, to any one so scrupulously clean as she was.”

“Well, she never looked dirty, I must say. But really, Askham, what can be the use of hoarding such old rubbish?”

“I have seen worse things than she possessed taken great care of by those to whom they belonged, and as long as I have a corner to house them in, there they shall remain until they are claimed. So if you chance to hear of a relative, pray let me know.”

“That I certainly will to please you, but I do not see the least chance of any heirs being found. Did she not leave a will, if her furniture is so choice?” he said, laughing in his peculiar way—laughing with his mouth and looking fierce with his eyes.

“I have found no written document of any kind,” said Mr. Askham.

“No, of course not ; most probably she could not write, and perhaps not read either.”

“I never saw her write, nor heard her read, but her old Bible was well thumbed and worn, so most likely she had the latter accomplishment.”

“Well, what are you going to do with this cottage,” said Mr. Royle ; “are you going to take up the floor to search for hidden treasure?”

“Certainly not,” said Mr. Askham; “it shall be repaired, and that is all.”

“But you may be sure there must be some hidden treasure; for that the old woman was never without her guineas and pound notes is well known in the neighbourhood.”

“We shall see about that. But I must beg you to excuse my staying any longer, for I see Ladds is come to speak to me, and I have much to attend to to-day.” And the two parted.

Mr. Askham then turned to meet the brick-layer, and gave the following instructions:—

“I want this cottage entirely cleaned out, whitewashed, repaired, and put in order. And should you find anything, or any piece of paper, or letter, or book, or anything written on, or in fact, anything whatsoever, a key or any trivial thing, I think I can rely on you, Ladds, to take care of it yourself, and bring it to me.”

“I’ll be sartin to do so, sir, at your bidding; and even for her own sake I would, for she was real kind to my little boy, and my girl too, for the matter of that, and many’s the farthel of cake she’s given ’em.”

Mr. Askham went to examine the rose bush,

and found that, although there was much broken and split, the root seemed unhurt. Ladds came to him with a small black key.

“See here, sir, this little key I found where the bed was ; it’s old-fashioned enough.”

“I had better take it with me,” said Mr. Askham ; “perhaps you will find something else in the same place.”

“I’ll see, sir.” Presently he came back again, saying, “Did you see that cupboard, sir ?”

“Which ?”

“The one under the window-seat, sir.”

“No ;” and he went into the cottage, and saw the cupboard which the man had opened. It was to all appearance full of parcels. Mr. Askham told him to take them out carefully ; which done, he sat down on the window-seat, and between them they unpacked the parcels. They all contained books, account-books, and written papers, many of them very faded and ancient.

“This may be what we wanted, Ladds ; but how shall I convey them home now the cart is gone ?”

“If you can spare me the time to run home,

I will soon be back with my cart, and will take them with pleasure, sir."

"Yes, that will do very well."

Ladds ran off to the village, and Mr. Askham continued the search by himself. In the back kitchen he saw a trap-door in the ceiling, and in the corner behind the door a most primitive ladder, evidently intended to give access to it. He placed it against the wall and got up the ladder, unbolted the trap-door, and pushed it back. He scared a couple of rats; but no box or basket, or anything except a few dirty rags, was to be seen, the place looking desolate and dirty beyond description by the faint light admitted by holes in the roof.

When Ladds came back with his cart he searched the loft, but nothing was found but scraps of rags and paper which the four-footed inhabitants had carried there to make their nests. It was arranged that not only was the cottage to be repaired, but a railing put up to enclose a portion of the common round the house to make a garden.

"It shall be thoroughly trenched and dug up, and so," said Mr. Askham "we shall prevent

people from digging for treasure, as I hear they have a wish to do."

The cart was packed with the last found parcels, and Mr. Askham gave the key of the cottage to Ladds, who drove off to the Hall. Mr. Askham set off to walk, but when he reached the common met his wife in her pony carriage. He told her of the breaking of the rose tree.

"What a tiresome man Mr. Royle is. I wish he had kept to his own 'potteries,' and not come here to annoy us. Do you think the rose tree is hopelessly broken. Let us go and look at it."

On the way he told her of the invitation he had given Mr. Royle.

"I am so glad you did that, and now they will know that no slight was intended, for I wrote notes and sent Thomas with them more than an hour ago. And his wife would probably have received hers before his return home. Why should people be so cross-grained and take everything for an injury where none is meant!"

"Never mind them, little woman; do not let them trouble you, they will find their own level."

"Yes, George; but in the mean time so many

explanations are required, one has to be on one's Ps and Qs with people one does not care for."

"Forget them, my love. Drive round the other side to see the rose tree."

"Well really, George, this is shameful. The whole bush is broken to bits. How very provoking! I wanted so much to transplant that pretty rose, to keep for her sake, poor old woman."

"I do not think it is killed, but we will send Crabtree up to see about it, and bring away all that is left of it."

"This is not the way for me to forget Mr. Royle."

"My dear love," said Mr. Askham, "at most this was but an accident."

"Perhaps you are right, dear, and I must own I am vexed." And she showed it by the way she whipped up the ponies as they left the cottage and returned to the Hall.

As they drove along the common they met the Rector.

"Do come up and dine with us," said Mr. Askham; "I want to consult you on various subjects."

“And ask Mrs. Dale to come too, if she will excuse this sudden thought,” said Mrs. Askham.

“My wife can’t come to-day I know, but I will with pleasure. How well you look, Askham.”

“Yes, does he not,” said Mrs. Askham. “I tell him the long rest has quite set him up.”

“Ah-h,” said the squire, with a sad face.

He told his wife of the intended railed-in garden at the cottage.

“That will be nice, George; and we will try to have a piece of her white rose tree always there. I am longing to know what the chests and parcels found to-day contain. What sort of a key did you find?”

“Here it is. It is a pretty little key, and finely worked in the ring. It is made of such smooth, close metal, I should not be surprised to find, if it is not bronze, that it is silver.”

“Then it will fit the ebony box perhaps. How black the key is.”

“I found—that is, Ladds found—two other keys, but they are clumsy enough.”

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. DALE DINES AT THE HALL.

MR. DALE came up to dinner according to his promise, and the whole subject of "Mother Pendle" was discussed as soon as the servants had left the room.

"That she was more than she appeared to be has long been my conviction," said Mr. Dale; "but her excessive reticence as to herself and her history could never be got over. And there was a sort of dignity about her which precluded intrusion of any kind. I had thought that probably she might, at her age, be taken ill some day, and then she would give some clue as to those she wished to see. But she was a very, I may say a remarkably, healthy woman, and during the time I have known her, now above ten years, she was sick but once, and then very slightly. My wife had a great wish to be kind to one so lonely; but although the old lady gratefully acknowledged her intentions, she always

declared she was not lonely, and wanted for nothing. I told my wife she should not attempt to patronize a person with evidently such a proud spirit. She answered she fully understood that, and had carefully avoided it, and it was easily to be seen the old lady herself did not consider she had done so. One very bad winter's afternoon, when the rain and sleet had come suddenly down," he continued, in an impressive tone of voice, "my wife was out and caught in the storm. The wind blew, the snow and sleet were quite blinding, and it was very slippery walking. She turned a corner and came upon old 'Mother Pendle,' who was labouring on against the wind and storm, which seemed to catch her large hood and bonnet, thereby increasing the difficulty of standing against it. My wife went up to her and said, 'Do let me go over the common with you this wild evening; it is so slippery, and the wind will be stronger up there without shelter. I am strong and young, and can so easily help you.' Will you take my arm? Please do," and held out her arm to her. The old woman put her thin, delicate hand upon my wife's arm, and with tears run-

ning down her face, though her voice never faltered, said, 'My love, I appreciate your kindness and good-will to me now, and at all times when we meet. I am quite able to walk over the common even in the storm, and if not, I could not take you so far away. My stick is a good support. Go home to your husband, cherish and love him as a good man deserves, and if you wish to insure your own happiness and his. Believe me, there is a Providence watching over me as well as the rest of mankind. Good-bye.' And with a slight pressure of her hand she turned, and walked away without looking behind. My wife stood and watched her for some time, weeping like a child ; she said there was something so sad and solemn in the old woman's voice and manner ; and she could not recover herself the whole evening. It was the longest sentence she had ever heard the old lady give utterance to, and was spoken in a low, tuneful, but firm tone of voice, with neither whining nor sobs ; but with intense feeling, and, as I have said, with tears. Her language too was that of an educated person. Often have we talked over this singular interview."

“Oh, poor dear creature!” said Mrs. Askham, whose eyes were dim with tears, “I wish she were alive now, that we might go to her and give her some comfort.”

“That, Louisa,” said her husband, “would be as impossible now as it ever has been, I take it. No one could prevail over such excessive secrecy at any time.”

“Probably,” said Mr. Dale, “this superiority which she could not conceal was the main cause of the ridiculous idea current among the lower classes that she was a witch.”

“That is very likely,” said Mr. Askham. “Giles, in talking to me, said hers was gentle-folks’ talk, and not their talk, and accounted for it by supposing she came from London, or far away. And he said her manners had such an effect upon Sally Giles that she could not sit down in her presence.”

“All these effects are very curious, and make one wish to know the truth,” said Mr. Dale.

“I have told you of some of the curiosities we found in her boxes, but I think we have come upon some papers to-day that may probably throw a little light upon her antecedents. I should wish

you to be present to examine them with me, for I feel a little anxious in undertaking a task so delicate alone."

"That I will with pleasure; but I have not time so completely at my disposal as you have, and am afraid I can only take it by fits and starts, as it were."

"You see, the fact is," replied Mr. Askham, sadly, "I feel a sort of responsibility. She may have relations and heirs, who may take it ill that I have looked into her papers. And who knows what unpleasantness might arise if, in that case, events or her wishes are not as they hope or desire! Should I examine them *alone*, accusations might be brought which, though undeserved, I should have no power to combat, having no witness."

"I quite understand your feeling, but I think you strain a point."

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Askham, mournfully, "who can tell the horrors that may come from what is unseen!"

"I should call that a morbid idea. But, however, if you feel it so strongly I certainly will be your witness. As to right doing, it can be

nothing else, and I do not think that is likely to be questioned. As I said, I will be with you when you like. Mrs. Askham," he continued, smiling, "cannot be taken into account, as a wife's evidence for or against her husband is of no value."

"So I am told," said Mrs. Askham; "but I am sure George is always to be believed, and can only act honourably."

"My dear love," returned Mr. Askham, smiling, "you do not know what heirs and relatives are in cases of inheritance. They want all they can get, and as much more as possible."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed the Rector. "Do you speak from experience, Askham? Was that your case? Did you expect to get two Woodnastons instead of one? or two marriage portions instead of one when you married Mrs. Askham?" The Rector laughed heartily and tried to turn the subject, to avoid the sadness that since his accident had crept over Mr. Askham occasionally.

"Ha, ha," laughed Mrs. Askham too. "He was deceived there then, for he only got half a portion when he married me."

"I have had it doubled and trebled since, my

love, by your excellence," said Mr. Askham, in a cheerful voice.

"I am glad," remarked Mr. Dale, as they all laughed, "that pretty compliments are become the order of the hour, for we were getting rather drowsy in our talk."

"Well, now, suppose we go into the drawing-room," interposed Mrs. Askham.

"And, George," she said, when they were there, "I should like to show Mr. Dale some of the beautiful Chinese ornaments."

"Not to-night, Mrs. Askham, if you please. We have been prosing so long in the dining-room that it is quite late, and in a few minutes I must go home. It is a beautiful moonlight night, and I shall go across the park through the church gate."

"Not just yet, Mr. Dale; and when you go George and I will go part of the way with you."

"About this examination, Dale; you will not expect me to do much in the matter?"

"As chairman of the committee of inquiry we have formed, and as the proprietor of the school, you ought to say something."

"Let it be as little as possible. I do not feel equal to it in any way."

"That must be guided by yourself. We cannot make you speak if you won't. Can we, Mrs. Askham?" he asked, laughing.

"When the time comes George will be quite able to say what is right. He has a good power of talking when he likes. You should hear him talk to me, Mr. Dale!" she answered.

"Ah, my dear, that is quite a different thing. Any nonsense will do for you."

"Oh, George! Mr. Dale, don't believe it."

"According to your own showing, not half an hour ago, I should be bound to believe what your husband said. But I must go.

"I can come to you to-morrow morning, Askham, if that will suit you," said Mr. Dale, as they went through the ante-room window which opened on to the verandah.

"You will lunch with us," said Mrs. Askham.

"I will with pleasure, but I must be home soon after two o'clock."

"A couple of hours' work looking over papers," said Mr. Askham, "is hardly worth the trouble of laying them out; so I will put off

the work-people at Ashencroft till the afternoon, and as soon as you can come up in the morning we will set to work in the library."

"Then I will be with you at half-past nine. You had better not come through the wet grass, Mrs. Askham."

"Well, I think not," she said, opening the shrubbery gate, through which he passed. "Good night."

"You are limping very much, George," she said, as they walked back.

"I am tired," replied the husband. "My ankle gets stiff. I feel it more than the hip."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SEARCH FOR RECORDS.

MR. ASKHAM considered that the bundles of papers last found would be likely to throw some light on the "Pendle" affairs, and he placed them on the table when he and the Rector sat down for their investigation. The outside coverings were excessively dirty, and must have remained for many years untouched.

The first parcel they opened was entirely composed of account-books ; some had "John Lystone, York," written on the cover. One was entirely devoted to stationery and books ; some to ordinary household affairs, rent and taxes ; and one a debtor and creditor account, in which the debtor was more prominent than the creditor ; others with "Ann Lystone" written inside the cover, very neatly kept, in a good woman's hand, all relative to personal affairs.

"Who were 'John and Ann Lystone' of York? Did you know that name, Dale?"

“I have heard it in the West Riding, and although those who bore it were not landowners, they were gentry — petty gentry I should call them. But this ‘John Lystone,’ from his account-book, probably kept a small stationer’s shop.”

“We will put them back again in their parcel ; and I think, Dale, we had better take this large bundle next. Will you open it ? ”

“These are letters tied up in packets.”

One packet contained numerous franks from Peers and prominent members of parliament during a long period, addressed to various persons ; some to “Mistress Ann Lystone, Monk Street, York ;” to the same at Bridlington, and other places. These were most often franked by “Becklea,” as were several letters addressed to “The Honourable and Reverend Edward O. Thurstane, Eddishowe, York.”

“Ah,” said Mr. Dale, “he was the son of Lord Becklea ; they were all more or less friends and acquaintances of my father’s ; and your father must have known them too.”

“Very likely ; but my father died young, as you know, when I was but twenty-four years of

age; and through being away either at Eton or college, or in the army, I did not know much about his friends and acquaintances. My mother died when we were children, and our house was not a gay one."

"Dear me, what a parcel of old rubbish to keep so carefully."

"Farmer Giles suggested the old woman might have been a lady's maid; if so, she probably collected these franks, with their great red seals, to dispose of them to collectors, and so make money by them. If you observe, there is seldom any writing at the back."

"Here is one dated 1749. On the inside is written—'Tell Earnshaw to get some new sewelling made. We will have some doe-hunting in November, when our little grand-daughter attains her first year.' It is addressed to 'The Countess of Becklea, Becklea Park, York.' Not a vestige of that fine property is to be seen now."

"I believe the Becklea family have died out."

"Yes; and the last Earl was such a scamp, he ran through all the property, and there was not sufficient after the sale to pay his debts.

"Who bought the property?"

“It was sold piecemeal, the house pulled down, and the name is not even known now ; but I remember it when I was a little boy.”

“We had better put the papers up as we found them, eh, Dale? ”

“Certainly.”

The next packet was labelled “From my dear uncle and godfather.”

“Oh, here we may have something nearer the point,” said Mr. Askham. “The chest of plate and the Chinese ornaments were from the ‘uncle and godfather.’ ”

The letters were on one sheet of paper folded in the old-fashioned way, and addressed on the outside, so that sender and receiver were at once identified.*

The letters began always “My dear Ann,” and ended “Your loving uncle and godfather, Edgar Thurstane.” The address was, “To the Lady Ann Thurstane, Eddishowe, York ;” or to the same at “Becklea Park, York.” Of a later date were a few addressed, “To Mistress Ann Lystone.” Some were only “For my dear

* An excellent custom lost in these days of separate envelopes.

grandniece Ann ;” these had evidently been enclosures.

“How the deuce did the old woman get hold of these ?” said Mr. Dale.

“Perhaps she was some relation of Lystone’s.”

“Who ? ‘The Lady Ann ?’ , That is scarcely probable.”

“Mother Pendle may have been.”

“I don’t know what to think of her ; she’s a riddle.”

They read and looked over the letters, which mostly gave descriptions of places visited, “which you, my dear niece, so much delight in ;” the customs, habits, and costumes of the people, with various little travellers’ anecdotes, but no word as to family history. There were letters also in other packets, but no clue to the personal history of “The Lady Ann,” or of “Mistress Ann Lystone,” could be gathered from them ; so they were repacked in their papers, and put aside.

“We are no further on than we were yesterday,” said Mr. Dale. “Have you any more letters and papers ?”

“There are boxes still unopened. How much longer time can you spare ?”

“I can remain to luncheon.”

“I am glad of that. I will call Louisa, as she wishes to see what is in the boxes.”

He left the room, and soon came back bringing Mrs. Askham, who said—

“And what have you found?”

“Not much to identify ‘Mother Pendle;’ there is nothing as yet to disprove Giles’s apparent foresight in pronouncing her a ‘lady’s maid.’”

“Oh, how provoking,” said Mrs. Askham, “I would rather have her the ‘Princess in disguise.’”

“Baby romance, Louisa, baby romance.”

“It is very amusing, George, and it does no one any harm. However, for the matter of that, it is really *your* romance, and not mine.”

“You are unalterably one and the same,” said Mr. Dale.

“Don’t laugh at us, Mr. Dale,” she answered, herself laughing.

“Certainly not; I laugh with you. Did any one answer your advertisement, Askham, after the old woman’s death?” he continued.

“No ; although I put it in York and London papers several times.”

“These bags contain money, George ; why not count it ? Mr. Dale, will you take those two, and George and I will have these.”

One of Mr. Dale's bags contained guineas, half-guineas, gold seven-shilling pieces, to the amount of nearly £80. The other bag was larger and heavier. It contained silver tokens ; Charles IV. Spanish dollars, having the miniature head of George III. impressed on the neck of the image ; crowns, half-crowns, shillings, sixpences, to the amount of £12.

“So the old lady was not without current coin of the realm, though some of it is of ancient date,” said Mr. Dale.

“Some of these are pretty, and some are curious,” said Mrs. Askham, looking them over ; “but George's bags are ponderous, and the contents ugly, though they may be curious. Great double pennies and ordinary pence, and various copper tokens, mostly quite new ; and some of the coins look like iron or lead.”

“There is above £3 worth of copper coin. She must have been a miser,” said Mr. Askham.

“And in this bag are rolls of bank notes of date 1798—9; the latest are 1802, almost all of £1.

“How many, George?”

“Wait a minute, till I have counted them.”

“I could never have imagined her to be such a miser,” said Mr. Dale; “for she was open-handed in a small way, poor old soul.”

“People said she was very charitable in giving away food,” said Mrs. Askham.

“In that may have been her security and wisdom,” said Mr. Dale; “for if she had been liberal in giving away money, some evil-disposed persons might have set upon her and robbed her, and there was no help at hand in that lonely cottage.”

“And you might add,” responded Mr. Askham, “her distinction as a ‘witch’ was effectually her safeguard. She most probably knew this, and therefore never resented it. Here are £53 in pound notes, and £24 in two pound notes, Louisa.”

“What hoards!” said Mrs. Askham. “Where did she get all this money?”

“Her accumulated wages, if a lady’s maid,” said Mr. Dale. “Or perhaps she had kept a

school, for by her education she was not a common person."

"That is the most likely supposition yet uttered," said Mr. Askham. "It might also account for her dignity of manner, her exquisite curtsy, her light and graceful step, all of which she may have acquired as the head of a young ladies' seminary."

"Or a housekeeper," said Mrs. Askham. "Or, George, she might have kept an inn. Remember how often we have admired the curtseys and manners of Keys, my uncle's housekeeper; and of Mrs. Fowler of the 'King's Head' at York. Their dignity and courtesy are perfect; I hope our little girls may be as courteous and dignified."

"It remains with yourself, my dear, to make them so. But I should not like to see Georgie, for example, take up the corner of her apron as Mrs. Keys does when she is speaking, nor show the backs of her hands straight down her sides, like Mrs. Fowler."

"What nonsense you talk!" said Mrs. Askham, laughing. "The idea of Georgie wearing an apron!"

“What can you remember about the Becklea family, Dale?” asked Mr. Askham.

“Not much I am afraid. They died out long ago, and there was no one to succeed to the title when the last Lord died.”

“Who was the ‘Lady Ann’?”

“I do not know. It was the custom in the last century to call the ladies of a noble family ‘my lady’ and ‘the lady,’ even if they did not *de facto* hold that title.”

“Could we not find out who the ‘Lady Ann’ was, who was grandniece and godchild to the Honourable Edgar Thurstane?”

“We might find some old genealogical tree or list of nobility that would show us. I fancy she must have been one of the Honourable and Reverend Edward Thurstane’s daughters, who have all passed away. I do not suppose there is one of the race now in existence. My father said when the last Lord died, that he was the last of the race, male or female.”

“How can we find out who ‘Mistress Ann Lystone’ was. She must have had some connection with the family, directly or indirectly; for there are franks addressed to her, as we have

seen, and in the same collection with those of the Becklea family."

"These franks may have been got together by some collector of autographs, perhaps a retainer, or friend of the family. Who knows but that 'Mother Pendle' may have been that retainer. The franks do not so much surprise me as the possession of the chest of plate and other valuables you have told me of."

"It seems to me an inextricable maze; but it must be unravelled. We have still half an hour's time; shall we open one of the boxes?"

"Certainly; reading over the letters has taken up so much time, apparently to no purpose, that I would fain hope the next packets will contain something else."

They placed the bundles of papers in their original soiled wrappers, and put them into the closet, bringing out a box that was nailed up.

Mrs. Askham had brought some tools, and after a little trouble the rusty nails were withdrawn. On lifting up the top papers, a child's suit of clothes was revealed, and Mrs. Askham drew forth the wardrobe of a boy, of perhaps

eight or ten years old, of the fashion of many years before. All were of good but not rich material, most carefully and closely packed.

“These are not the clothes of a common child,” said Mrs. Askham. “Poor woman! I wonder if these belonged to her own child, that she has hoarded them up so carefully. She wore a wedding ring, I remember. By the bye, George, what became of that ring; she surely had it on when she was found buried in the snow?”

“I never thought about it. Do you know, Dale?”

“Now you mention it, I think Mrs. Wright of the ‘King’s Head’ wished to have it as a remembrance; and she also had her stick, which was found near the place where the poor old woman lay—or, I should say, sat.”

“What was done with her clothes?” said Mrs. Askham. “I should like to have had her bonnet.”

“They were so completely destroyed and sodden with the wet that they were burnt. It was supposed she had remained buried in the snow for five or six weeks,” said Mr. Dale.

“ Five or six weeks ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Askham.

“ Yes, from the time she was last seen. The snow-drift in the gravel-pit in which she was found was at one time twenty feet high.”

“ Poor creature, how she must have suffered ! ”

“ Not at all, Louisa,” said Mr. Askham. “ She probably was completely benumbed, perhaps already partially frozen when she fell ; or perhaps sat down to rest, in which case death comes like uncontrollable sleep, and there is no pain.”

“ I am glad of that, poor soul. Everything I hear makes me the more lament how impossible it was for us to have known her better, or be able to help her.”

“ We leave you, Louisa, to pack up these things again. It will be well to show Mr. Dale the plate in the four-locked chest.”

“ Oh, delightful ! I shall have packed this box by the time you have got it out of the closet.”

Mr. Dale assisted Mr. Askham to bring out the chest, and was exceedingly interested in the ingenuity of the locks.

“ The plan of these locks would be no disgrace

to one of the famous old iron-workers, artists they may be called, of Holland," said Mr. Dale.

When the chest was opened he examined the various articles of silver most minutely. Mr. and Mrs. Askham did the same, for on the former occasion their time was too short to admit of more than a glance at them. They were all struck with admiration at their beauty.

"They look prettier to-day than they did when we first saw them," Mrs. Askham said. "What a charming 'uncle and godfather' to make such handsome presents! I hope we shall find out the history of them. Now, George, shall I fetch the Chinese inkstand? You can put that away after Mr. Dale is gone."

"No, my love; I must ask him to help me; it is very heavy, and I do not intend the servants to see these things or where they are kept—yet, at least."

However, the words were scarcely said before the door opened, and the footman entered to announce luncheon whilst all the gold and silver plate was spread out on the table.

"Dear me, how very provoking," said Mr. Askham, when the servant was gone.

“I do not think it will much signify,” said his wife ; “Farmer Giles knows all about it as well as we do.”

“I am very glad he does,” said Mr. Askham ; “but that is a different case to the servants knowing it, until everything is made clear. They will talk.”

CHAPTER XX.

A LETTER FOUND.

LADDS the bricklayer came up to Mr. Askham one morning and brought with him a writing-desk, which he said he had found at the side of the cupboard near the fireplace in the cottage, and which had escaped notice when they searched before ; there was no key found with it. Mr. Askham sent a note to Mr. Dale by Ladds, begging him to come up to the Hall ; and in the course of an hour he arrived. The lock of the old desk was so poor that by a twist of the hands Mr. Dale opened it. It contained some money, writing materials, &c., and at the bottom was a letter addressed to Mr. Askham.

They were not a little astonished to find this, and at once Mr. Askham opened it and read as follows (there was no date) :

“MY DEAR SIR,

“You will, I am sure, forgive my writing to you on matters of business. The

courtesy I have always experienced from you leads me to think you will grant my requests as willingly as your most excellent and courteous father would have done, had he survived to the day when you will receive this letter, which will not be till after my decease. My days are getting to an end ; I feel the infirmities of age creeping upon me, although I have not reached the threescore and ten years allotted to mankind ; but a great part of my life has been passed in troubles and anxiety, which hasten old age. How far this may have been brought about by my own act is difficult to say ; for I believe that in a great measure our destinies are fixed without our choice, and we have to do our best, whether for better or worse, often in a far different sphere to that in which we are born. However that may be, although part of my life has been chequered with bitterness, heart-burnings, sorrows, oh, how great !—the sorrows overruling all other trials by manifold pangs and tortures incomprehensible to those who have not passed through them ; yet there has often come a season of joy—not mirth, pray understand, but that peacefulness of joy which is the

birthright of sorrow ; that serenity of mind which shows us the wisdom of God even in our misery, and the many tender mercies which are daily, I may say hourly, vouchsafed to us, if we will only view them as such. And while some human beings embitter our lives, and are cruel, strange, and distant, others are led to alleviate our sorrows by their kindness and obliging manners. I have experienced both the evil and the good. The hearts of the young are mostly turned to those who seem to require attention. And God's dear dumb creatures are ever good ; they reward tenfold any love they receive ; so to them and to the young, He lends the power of giving pleasure and joy to those who will accept it. My mind is weary ; I cannot express all that I intend to convey. I must again ask your forgiveness, my dear sir, for troubling you with these reflections, which must appear quite beyond the point, and altogether out of place. Yet perhaps, if you have the patience to read *all* I would have you, you may find that they are only a sequence to former words.

“I am not going to be mysterious, I am

going at once to ask you to act for me after my death ; and I venture to think that you will do so, and will carry out my wishes much better than I could myself. I beg you to accept from me, as the greatest favour you can do me, ALL I POSSESS, subject to certain conditions which you will find elsewhere declared. I beg you to believe that I have no relations nor any connections, male or female, who could claim from you what I bequeath to you.

“In this letter, which is also my will, and must be used as such, though it will not have the usual form of two witnesses, I appoint you my heir and residuary legatee, to carry out my wishes, elsewhere set down, according as you shall see right to be done.

“My duty is now done. Accept my blessing. May you and yours be ever prosperous and happy, as seems your lot in life ; and may the blessing of God and good health attend you always.

“I will ask you to be good enough to express to Mr. and Mrs. Dale my thankfulness for their constant solicitude on my behalf. I know that they would have been kind and benevolent to

me had I been able to accept it. The Misses Cavendish also have my gratitude for their kind words and intentions ; and all the tradespeople without an exception have my thanks for their very kind attentions. To Farmer Giles and his wife I am much indebted for courtesy and sympathy of which they little guessed the value and appropriateness.

“And now I will take my leave, with compliments to yourself and Mrs. Askham, who has often cheered me with her graceful acknowledgments as she passed. May her bright face never be clouded with harrowing care, ‘carking care,’ as we say in Yorkshire.

“I beg to remain, my dear Sir,

“Your obedient Servant and Friend,

“ANN CAROLINE EDITHA LYSTONE,

“Known as, and commonly called in Woodnaston, ‘Mother Pendle,’ or ‘Ann Pendle.’”

The letter was written on one sheet of foolscap paper, and addressed—

“To GEORGE ASKHAM, Esq., J. P.,

“Woodnaston Park.”

When Mr. Askham had read the letter he

handed it to Mr. Dale, and begged him to read it aloud, being too much taken by surprise and overcome to do so himself.

After reading it Mr. Dale said, "This is the letter of a well-educated person, but at the beginning she evidently could not collect her ideas." Then, after a pause, he added, "The plot thickens. What shall we come to next?"

"The other papers mentioned," said Mrs. Askham. "How kind of her, and how strange, George, that she should make you her heir! Poor woman, I wish we had known her! So all these beautiful and curious things belong to you!"

"Not yet, my love; you heard that she said 'SUBJECT TO CERTAIN CONDITIONS.' We must find out what these 'conditions' are before I can appropriate a single thing. They must all remain precisely as they are till we get the clue to the poor old lady's intentions. I cannot at all think how it is she has chosen me as her heir."

"The name by which she signs herself," said Mr. Dale,—“the name is peculiar: ‘Ann

Caroline Editha Lystone.' Can that have anything to do with the 'Ann Lystone' in the account-book, think you?"

"Perhaps she was the daughter or sister of those Lystones."

"Then she married somebody named 'Pendle' to become 'Mother Pendle' and 'Ann Pendle,' the names she says she is known by here. How can we find out about her, George?" inquired Mrs. Askham.

"I think I shall have to go to York to see what I can ferret out in Monk Street; perhaps they may be still remembered there, notwithstanding the old date of the books."

"Why did she not put her name and genealogy in her Bible, or tear it out and enclose it in her letter, if it had been there. It is very perplexing, George."

"There are still many things to be searched," said Mr. Dale.

"Oh yes, and the ebony box," said Mrs. Askham. "Shall I fetch it? I fancy that pretty little black key will open it."

She fetched the box, and Mr. Askham tried the key, but it was too small.

“How provoking! Where are the other keys, George?”

“It will be a silver key for this,” said Mr. Dale, taking up the box and examining it. “And there are loose articles inside it. We must be careful, or we may break something.”

No silver or any other key was to be found that would fit the box.

“I have a great admiration for that little black key, and I am sure we shall find something worth having under its lock. What should you say it belonged to, Mr. Dale?”

“I have not seen many of your new acquisitions, so I cannot judge; but it would probably belong to some fancy article, made more for show than for good service.”

“I agree with you, Dale, and probably we shall find it fits one of those red leather boxes. Louisa, where are they?”

“Here they are, all mildewed and spoilt. What a pity! The leather would come off in one’s hands with very little trouble.”

“They have seen good service in their day,” said Mr. Dale, and he took up the little desk and rubbed the blackened shield on the top

with his glove. "Here is a coronet, and the letters G. B."

"We found a coronet somewhere else; where was it, George?"

"I do not recollect."

"Now, Mr. Dale, do try the key."

The key unlocked the desk with very little trouble, and in the circumscribed space under the top part, when it was opened out, a variety of keys were found, and some coins. The desk was prettily mounted in silver inside, and lined with red silk velvet, very much the worse for wear.

"'G. B.' has made this her habitual writing-desk evidently," said Mrs. Askham; "and 'Mother Pendle,' or 'Ann Pendle,' may have been Farmer Giles's 'lady's maid,' and so had it given to her by the 'Countess G. B.' Don't you think that is coming near the truth, George?"

"Really I cannot say, and I do not intend to speculate on the subject; it is now pretty certain we shall come to the thread of the labyrinth sooner or later."

"Oh, sooner, please, George; I am so impatient——"

“So I see, my dear,” remarked Mr. Askham, with a smile.

“Oh, don’t laugh,” she answered, herself laughing. “I mean I am so impatient to find it all out. We never had such a mystery as this.”

“This key will, I think, Mrs. Askham, unlock the box.”

“I am so glad. Here it is ; open it, please.”

“Gently,” said Mr. Dale, laughing ; “this requires nice handling.”

It proved to be the right key, but the lock was spoilt, or not a good one, and it was opened with difficulty.

“Red cases !” exclaimed Mrs. Askham ; “miniatures, no doubt ! George, come here ; it is your property, you know.”

“Indeed I know no such thing. But we will open them, as we must everything else. Dale, do you help us.”

There were about a dozen miniatures, portraits of gentlemen in court dress or uniform, and ladies in full dress, and, with few exceptions, with powdered heads. One lady, who was without powder, was dressed in black velvet, with a transparent black veil over her head and

shoulders ; the ancient dress of a widow. One, a very young man dressed in pale blue, with powdered hair, particularly struck Mr. Dale ; he held it in its open case and seemed quite absorbed in meditation over it.

“What have you there, Mr. Dale, that you admire so much ?”

“I do not know that I admire it excessively ; it is a good face, and well painted ; but what I am much struck by is the great look, I cannot call it a positive likeness, that it has to poor old ‘Mother Pendle.’”

“Oh, Mr. Dale,” said Mrs. Askham, “how can you make fun of her ?”

“Indeed I am not ridiculing her ; but look yourself. Is there not a wonderful look about the eyes and the straight, small nose ? Askham, do look at it. Of course there is all the difference between a very young man and an old woman, but still I see a strong likeness.”

“Yes, I do see it, now you have pointed it out,” said Mrs. Askham. “Look, George ; you saw her more often than I did, and have spoken to her. Yet even with that similarity of expression it is ridiculous to think that young courtier

can have had any connection with her. The fact is, she is so much in our thoughts that we imagine we see likenesses where none can exist."

After a pause, Mrs. Askham, who had been minutely examining the case of this miniature, exclaimed, "See, they are not fastened in, at least this one comes out of its case by this little loop. Ah! here is a piece of paper." And unfolding it, she read, "The Honourable Edward Oswy Thurlestane, aged twenty, subsequently in holy orders."

"Dear me," said Mr. Dale, "that may be the Rector of Eddishowe, whom we all knew so well." He said this in a low voice, as speaking to himself.

"In this way," continued Mrs. Askham, "we shall know who they all are. There is 'E. O. T.' in gold letters on the brown hair at the back. You have a pretty one, George; who is it?"

"One moment, Mistress Impetuous. This is beautiful altogether. Oh, this has the coronet and 'C. A. B.' over the golden hair. On the paper is written, 'Caroline Ann, Countess of Becklea, wife of Oswy, fourth earl.'"

"Oswy!" said Mr. Dale; "he must have been

the father of the last two Earls. I have often heard my father speak of him and his Countess ; they were near neighbours of ours, and intimate friends, in my father and mother's young days ; but all came to an end with the last Earl—he was a sad scamp.”

“How could she come by these things ? Ah ! ‘my lady’s tire-woman.’ Farmer Giles is right.”

“Do not jump to conclusions, Louisa. Come and look at this ; it is most exquisite. What magnificent pearls round the dark blue enamel. We must open them and shut them up again without much examination for the present, for I see Dale looking at his watch, and it is getting on for one o’clock. You can come again, can you not, Dale ; for I am more determined than ever to have you with me in these researches, particularly as there are ‘certain conditions’ attached to my legacy.”

“Oh yes, when you like, but I cannot have a fixed time to be absent from the Rectory. It may take us longer than we expect, if there are papers to look over. I cannot come to-morrow ; the next day I think I can come in the morning if that will suit you.”

“Very well. Whilst we have boxes to unpack it will be best to do it by daylight; but when we have only papers to look over, perhaps you can come and dine with us, and we will do it in the evening, so that we shall both have our days unfettered.”

“I shall be very glad to do so.”

Mrs. Askham had continued to take out the miniatures, and at the bottom of the box she found a larger square case covered with a coarse sort of varnished black linen. It was so firmly closed she could not open it.

“Try and open this for me, George; I think it must be glued together. It is an ugly-looking box to be with these nice red morocco and shagreen cases.”

“The varnish has even fixed the hooks. I fear I shall break it; my left hand is still weak. Dale, will you try?”

Mr. Dale soon forced it open with a knife, and inside they found two coarse and ill-painted likenesses in oils; both were young men in uniform. On a slip of paper appended to one was written, “Portrait of the Honourable Edgar Thurstane, aged twenty-eight, painted in the

Low Countries by J. van Ness." The other, a younger man, also had his label, thus: "The Honourable Athelstan 'Thurlestane. They both fell in the battle of Enghien, 1692."

"I cannot say very much for the painting; and more sorry-looking fellows I never saw," remarked Mr. Askham.

"Their parents considered the portraits precious, no doubt, poor fellows," said Mrs. Askham. "Here is another who met with an untimely end: this pretty little child, 'The Honourable John Thurlestane, aged five years. He fell in the battle of Prestonpans, 1745, aged twenty-two.'"

"Yes," said Mr. Dale, "they were all Royalists and warriors; the latter may account for their having died out so soon."

They had now finished their researches for the day, and as they proceeded to the dining-room Mr. Askham said to Mr. Dale—

"It appears to me that there must have been some connection, if not relationship, between the old lady and the portraits. Can you tax your memory, Dale, to recall what you may have

heard of the Thurlestane family from your father and mother? ”

“I will try, but I do not expect to bring much grist to the mill, for I was seldom at home after I left for Eton; the distance was great, and travelling difficult in those days, so that I only went back for the summer holidays. In the winter I went to my uncle in London. Afterwards I went to a private tutor, an old friend and school-fellow of my father's, near Melton, where I had more hunting than studies, and I should have been better at home, for all the learning I got. Then I went to another tutor at Woolstone, in the West Riding, for a short time; and afterwards to Oxford, where the same impediment to travelling existed, except in the summer. Thus literally I passed very little of my life at home. I have two sisters older than myself: the eldest, Mrs. Page, ‘sweet Ann Page,’ as we boys called her, though her name is Charlotte, is six years older than I am, and has a good memory; I will write to her for all the particulars she can give me of the Becklea family.”

CHAPTER XX.

JOHN FERNER.

POOR Mary Stokes passed much of her time in tears for the first few months after she had lost her husband. All the worry and anxiety she had had on his account vanished in the remembrance of his goodness to her before. How happy she had been ! Could there be a more kind and loving husband ! The poor children would never know what they had lost in losing so good a father. How could she exist alone in the cottage ? Who was to pay the rent that now would be required of her if she stayed there ? Whither should she go if required to leave ?

She would go and ask Mr. Askham, that she would ; he could give her advice.

It was in this unhappy state of mind that she went to him, as we have seen in a former part of the story.

Greatly was she relieved when she got home after that interview with "her master," as he

had now become. Life seemed more palatable to her now that she had some occupation in view, and value to receive for her work. She understood the management of poultry very well, and it was a pleasure to her to rear it for her master, who was so kind and compassionate.

John Ferner (the quarryman who had brought the news of the finding of Will Stokes's body to the woodmen at the time of the Squire's accident in the wood) often came by her cottage on his way to the quarry where he worked. It was he also who had found the body of "Mother Pendle" in the same quarry. He called to see Mary, and helped her in getting peat and wood, as he had done even before her widowhood; for her husband had, the truth to tell, been very neglectful of his home and her wants for some time before his death. She had had to go herself and fetch a few peats, scarcely enough for the day's consumption, but as much as she could carry the long distance she had to walk to get it.

John was pleased to see her resume her active habits with a cheerful countenance. His visits became more frequent; she seemed to look for

his coming, and had always something pleasant to say when he did come. He took courage, and in his kind but blunt way suggested it must be "woful dull" living there all by herself; he felt it dull enough in his little cabin all by himself. Why should they not join housekeeping, and go and see Mr. Dale about it?

Mary immediately began to cry and talk of "puir Will and the childer. I couldn't let 'em forget their puir faither."

"No, they shan't forget he," he would say.

"But they will."

"No, they shan't, and I'll be a faither to 'em. Cum, Mearie, we've known ourselves long enough; and of all the lassies, I always looked to you as the best to my mind."

"Oh, I couldn't forget puir Will."

"There's no call for your forgetting of him."

"I couldn't hev two at once."

"You've lost one, more's the pity. So now you'll take to another."

"No, I can't forget puir Will," was her constant reply.

Often and often did much the same words pass between them, till at last Mary got a fright.

A strange man was seen about the common ; one of her fowls was missed ; a high wind had blown some of her child's clothes behind the hedge, and she immediately accused the strange man of having stolen them. Another fowl was lost. What should she do ! They were Mr. Askham's fowls.

She never saw the man again, but she still imagined him to be near at hand. In process of time the hens each came back with a brood of chickens, to her great delight ; the child's pinafores lay where they had been blown by the wind—but she steadily declared they had been brought back again by the man who took them. She forgot that in her terror of the man, she had never looked behind the hedge for them. However, all these terrors, though merely fancies, decided her that it would be better for her to take John Ferner's proposition into consideration. She would not forget poor Will, no, that she wouldn't, nor allow the children to forget their father ; but——

“ If Mr. Ferner——” and she paused. “ If John Ferner——” She could get no further. “ Well, if John Ferner—should—but what's the

use of thinking about it—she had refused him so often——” and here she began to cry.

“What, Mearie, in tears again?” said a well-known voice. “Cum, lass, hold up. What’s the matter now?”

“Oh, John!” with a sigh and a sob.

“What is’t, lass? I dinna loike to hear thee greet. Look up, lass. What is’t? Speak, lass. Has any one been offendin’ of thee? Let me see the ruffian that would offend thee; I’d soon do for he,” he said, as he went close up to her.

“Oh, John!” was all she could say. She kept her apron to her face, and sobbed louder and louder.

John put his arm round her waist. “Cum, Mearie, love,” he said, in a soothing voice, “I canna bear to hear thee greet. And thee’s a slobberin’ all down thee apron, love. Look up, lassie.”

“Oh, John!”

He put his face by the side of hers. “What is’t, love?”

“Oh, John! I canna say.”

“Shall I tell thee what to say, love?”

“Oh, John! I canna—I’s afeared.”

“ Well, try. Shall I tell thee what to say? Say they three words—‘ I love you ; ’ they’ll do for me.”

“ Oh, John, how wicked of you ! I canna forget puir Will,” and she cried loudly again.

Hearing all this sobbing and crying, the children came out of the cottage screaming too, and clung to their mother.

“ Well, to be sure ! Sure summat’s happened.” And he left Mary and took the boy, saying, “ Cum here, Will. What’s to do with all this screekin’ ? ”

“ Muther ! ”

“ What are ye screekin’ for ? ” he said again.

“ Cos muther screeks,” shrieked the boy.

“ Is that a’ ? Well, I can’t stand this no longer. Cum, Mearie,” he said, going back to her.

When he left her so suddenly and went to the child her tears ceased ; perhaps a slight degree of disappointment was caused by his last words. With red and swollen eyes and nose—the reverse of picturesque even in the face otherwise most beautiful, whatever poets and fanciful people may

say — she looked up in his face and said,
“ Well, John ! ”

“ Aye, lass, it is well thee has cum to that at last. If ye will not tell me what ye greet for, at any cost say Yes or No. Will ye leave this lonely life and take up wi’ a fellow as loves ye dearly ? ”

“ I canna forget puir Will.”

“ Drat ‘puir Will,’ ” he said, impatiently. “ What would ye have ? You canna go all your life callin’ for puir Will, as is ‘ gone the way of all flesh,’ as ta’ parson says ; what way soever that be I don’t know, but it’s not looking after and taking care of thee.”

“ Oh, John, dinna talk so wicked.”

“ I ain’t wicked, Mearie ; but it ’ud be wickeder of me to see thee in want and lonely when I could help thee ; so say the word, Mearie. Can’t thee take a fellow and be his own wife as loves thee true ? It never was meant for folks to live alone in places, afeard of tramps and thieves. No, Mearie, we all should have our mates. So, Mearie, thee’ll be my gude wife, and I loves thee true.”

She had allowed herself to be taken in his

arms, and was looking up into his honest face.

"Aye, John," she said, "I believe you. Ye's a true and lovin' soul, and I do love ye true, I do believe, too."

"That's right, Mearie. So we'll go to Mr. Dale and ask he to put us up in the church, and we'll be married as soon as the askin' is over."

"Not that very day, John?"

"Well, next day as is."

Mary's tears were now dried up, and they were both happy.

"But, John," she said one day, "the childer!"

"Never fear the childer; they be thy childer, and they shall be mine."

"Gude ye are, John," said Mary.

"Thee needn't 'a been so coy, lass. I kenned thee loved me long ago," he said to her some days after.

"Oh, John!"

"Aye, thee did, lass. Thee eyes told me that, and the smile of the cheek, tho' thee wudn't say it—no, that ye wouldn't. But for all that ye did, lass, I can tell ye. But it's all over now,

lass; there's only to-morrow's asking 'twixt us now. And I told Mr. Dale we'd be down at the church soon after his brekfus; so mind you're ready, lass. And ye'll put on that kirtle, Mearie, and the ribbins I brought ye frae Ulsford fair, eh?"

"Aye, John." And with a sigh, "I'll be foiner nor when I wed puir Will!"

"Put he aside a bit now, lassie, till we're married a bit. And what are ye going to do wi' this?" he said, touching her wedding ring.

"Ye'll take that off to-morrow, John, and I'll put it in my box." Then, after a pause, "No, John, ye shall keep it for me."

"Aye, lassie, and that I will joyfully. And it's all put straight that Farmer Giles will lend we his shay-cart and horse Robin; he goes capital, though he be a bit blind. And we'll go to Ulsford, lassie, after the church; and there's a galantee show, and a fat woman as is cum to Ulsford for a show, and we'll go to see 'em, and we'll have rump steak and onions for dinner at the 'Travelers' Rest,' and we'll be right joyful, Mearie. And we'll cum back afore dark and take up the childer frae Mistress Gileses, who's

had 'em all day, and we'll be home afore dark after we've supped at her house ; so she says we're bound to do, and right merry too."

"Hey, John ! but it's a grander weddin' nor I had wi' puir Will."

"Let he bide a bit, Mearie."

"Aye, John ; and ye're right good to me, ye are," she said, kissing him.

CHAPTER XXI.

MARY BOWES.

MR. DALE took his beagles out for exercise one morning as far as the Sleamoor, and went to the house of Mary Bowes. He called to her several times before any one came. At last she appeared running round the corner of her cottage with soapsuds up to her elbows, her face all aglow with fresh colour, and her coarse apron and gown wet.

“Well, sir, to be sure!” she said. “The sight o’ you be as pleasant as flow’rs in May. I hope, sir, ya’r well in health, tho’ I’m sure I needn’t ax that. Why lors, sir, it’s months sin you’ve been here.”

“Yes, Mary, it is some time since I came this way. And how are you all? What have you been doing this long while?”

“Doing, sir! Well, we’re doing foine, and much as usual, but we had a month’s trouble in the early summer last year.”

“How was that?”

“Why, sir, we’d a young man here; puir chap, we thought he’d a died outright with the fever, but he got sprat at last.”

“Where is he?”

“He’s gone whoam I s’pose, sir, leastways we’ve not seen ’un since he left.”

“Who was he?”

“A traveller wi’ pack-horses, a sight on ’em, all of a row; I never see the loike come this way afore, tho’ I’ve seen a passel of five or six go by our place up to Carlisle way, afore I was married.”

“What was his name?”

“Lor, sir,” she said, laughing, “he’d the curiosest name I ever hear. He called hissself E-um. Did ye ever hear that name afore, sir?”

“Oh yes; it is the short for Edmund.”

“Well, to be sure! His old father said his name was Greenwood; they’d come a long ways off. I can’t mind the name, but it’s somewhere in Yarksheer.”

“What sort of a fellow was Eam?”

“He wur the innicentest fere I ever cum

across; there wur no guile in he; he wor as harmless as a bairn, and right cannie too, when he cum to."

"Why did he come here?"

"Puir laddie, he was jus' taken bad comin' across the moor, and was brought in here dead-like, but he breathed so hard. The old man axed could we take 'un in and do for 'un whiles he had to go on wi' the packs. So we took he and put he in a bed that was made for Nancy, my sister, but she hadn't come. We give him a drink of feverfew; that's rale good for a fever, ye know, sir. He'd fever well on him; he was burnin' hot and rampagious like, callin' for 'muther' and 'Abie,' nothin' else, all the time. Me and my mon we'd to sit up wi' him o' nights, or he'd wriggle out o' bed and be his death p'r'aps. Ah! I knowed he was comin' the day afore."

"How did you know that?"

"The candle, sir. There was such a bunch in the candle. The flame was near put out wi' it. So says I to my mon, Jim, says I, 'There's a rare lot o' strangers comin'.'

"'Lors, Moll,' says Jim, 'how ye do talk.'

“ ‘ Ah, but, Jim,’ says I, ‘ lookee here ; here’s a bunch on ’em, and one’s going to stay.’ ”

“ ‘ It’s Nancy,’ says Jim, ‘ and she be no stranger soever.’ ”

“ ‘ It’s no Nancy, Jim,’ says I, ‘ it’s a rale stranger.’ ”

“ ‘ He’d be a sorner then,’ says Jim, ‘ and we don’t want no sorners, a eating us up without payin’.’ ”

“ So I wor right, and so was the candle, for the like did come to be ; and Jim wasn’t right, for he’s been no sorner, but a rale good lad, and his faither pays right well, and won’t let him want for nothen, he says. Lors, how the puir old man did fret about leaving him ! he greet sore about it. But he said I looked as if I’d be kind to ’un ; and sure I would, even if he’d not been the good lad he be. It was a pleasure to have ’un here after the fear of his life was gone. As to Jim, he’d like to keep ’un for aye, he be so useful and ready.”

“ He was not likely to have done any one a bad turn then, or be malicious ? ”

“ Lors bless you, sir ! do a bad turn ? why he hadn’t it in him ; he was al’ays blithe and merry

as a lark when he got well ; never idle. He'd go out wi' Jim on the moor ; he'd handle the spade and stack the peat as well as Jim could ; but it was too hard for he, he was that weak still. And he'd spin for me, but he couldn't spin foine tho', he said that was lassies' work ; and he'd laugh and sing and chatter his jeers and fun all day long. And such a song he'd sing !” She laughed loud at the recollection of it. “ It made her laugh and we too. Nancy come after to help, and she greet hard to lose him when he went away.”

“ What was his song ? ”

“ I canna tell ye, sir, it was that long. He was sure there be none in Yarksheer didn't know that song, and we should too ; but ‘ Saddle-to-rags ’ was what he ca'd it, and he said it was rale Yarksheer.”

Mr. Dale laughed.

“ Ah, ‘ Saddle-to-rags ! ’ he was right ; it is known everywhere in Yorkshire. Did the old man come back ? ”

“ Yes, sir ; he come back, and was glad to see the lad better. They talked and laughed together a long time, but the lad was no well yet, dazed

and dinged-like a seeing of his faither, and had to be left quiet after. So the old man said he would come or send to fetch 'un. But the lad got better. He heard Jim talking about them races on the 10th o' June, and nothen would do but he must go to see it, and some wrestlers as were to be. So off he set."

"When was that?"

"Well——" considering a`minute or two. "It was Monday, the 7th o' June last year. He'd more nor twenty mile to get to the races, and he said he'd go slowly. Right sorry was we to see he go; we quite loved 'un."

"Did you see him or hear of him again?"

"We've never seed he since. But he'll come back one day, he says," and she laughed, "and I believe he will. He and Nancy were on together," she said, with a knowing look.

"But did you never hear anything of him since he left?"

"Yes, sir; we heard a pack o' lies as nobody could b'lieve. I was that angry, I'd like to have clapped the fellow's ears that said 'em. And Jim he laughed outright, and said nobody need prate a pack o' lies like that to he, he'd never b'lieve

'un if they swore it on their bended knees ; he said it was impossible, let alone the lad being a good lad."

" But what were the lies ? "

" Lies, sir ! ye may ca' 'em that," said Mary Bowes, reddening with anger and excitement. " Why, sir, they said he'd gone and murdered a man outright, and was well-nigh being hanged for it heself, only they could not prove it. ' Prove it,' says I ; ' no, nor you nor nobody. Why the puir lad's only just out of a fever, and could na' kill a cat, let alone a man. And by natur he wouldn't hurt a fly.' "

" Did they mention his name ? "

" Aye, sir, they'd that pat enough, and that he'd been lodging here. Jim got into a rage, too, like me, and said out to the man, ' Why lors, what lies ye do talk, to be sure ! And what have ye done wi' he ? ' ' Oh, he's sneaked off,' says the man. ' Sneaked off ! ' cried Jim. ' He'll no sneak nowheres. And you'd better " sneak off " too,' says Jim, ' if ye want to keep a whole skin. Ye'll find no good a talking aboon that puir lad here ; we knows 'un better nor they at Woodnaston.' "

" Is that all you heard ? "

“We didn’t want no more, sir, that was enough o’ lies for one day. But I should like to hear from Eam how it came about.”

Mr. Dale told her what had happened.

“I thank ye kindly, sir,” she said, “for taking care of him; he’s a gude lad, and will take it kind of you too; and as to his old faither and people at whoam, they will thank you on their bended knees.”

During Mr. Dale’s story she made running comments of “Lors, how wicked people be, to be sure!” Then she gave way to tears and laughter by turns, as the narration proceeded, and told of Eam’s merry ways; and finally rejoicing at the happy conclusion, saying, “That’s he all over, sir. He have a power o’ fun with he; he’d come it ower anybody, whether crowner or not, wi’ his fun, and he so innicent too. Well, sir, I’m right thankful to ye for coming to tell us the rights of it, though, as they say, there’s summat of truth at the bottom o’ most lies. He was suspected, but didn’t do it. Ha, ha, ha. No, nor he couldn’t ha’ done it if he tried.”

Mr. Dale rode away with his beagles as she said, “God bless you, sir.”

Her cottage was not in Woodnaston parish, but close upon the border. It was a good ten miles ride to get there, so that Mary and her husband had little interest in Woodnaston ; but Mr. Dale and Mr. Askham were well known all over the country.

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. DALE HEARS FROM MRS. PAGE.

THE rector had been particularly busy all the morning, and had gone out before the post came in at ten o'clock.

When he returned his little boy Jeffrey came running to him. "Oh, papa, there's such a large letter for you, and such a quantity to pay for it. Mamma says it's from Aunt Charlotte, your Aunt Charlotte."

"My Aunt Charlotte! I have not an aunt so named."

"Oh yes, papa, you know what I mean."

"I can only tell what a boy means by what he says or does. If you say one thing and mean another, how am I to understand you?"

"Oh yes, papa."

"Oh no, my son."

"Well, papa, I mean your sister, our

Aunt Charlotte, not mamma's sister, Aunt Charlotte."

"That is plain ; I understand now."

"Well, papa, but there is one thing I don't understand, that is, why the postman should want three shillings and twopence for this letter. You had a larger letter the other day, and he only asked tenpence for that. Ought mamma to give him three shillings and twopence for the letter to-day ?"

"Of course, my dear ; it is not optional with the postman how much is to be paid for a letter ; it depends upon the weight and the distance it has come. Now come in ; we will see about this letter."

"Mamma has it."

"Here is a long letter for you, Alan," said Mrs. Dale, as they entered the drawing-room.

"Charlotte makes the most of her letters, but I expect it will be really a long one to-day. Ah, yes, crossed as usual ; fortunately she writes a plain hand."

He then sat down and read it. It ran thus :—

“MY DEAR ALAN,

“IN answer to your inquiries about the Becklea family, I will tell you what I remember of them; and as nearly as I can what I used to hear my father and mother say.

“They were a very old family in the county. Becklea park and manor had belonged to the Thurstanes above five hundred years, it was said; but the title was only given by King Charles II. They were Royalists, as my father used to say, ‘to the backbone,’ and Yorkists in the same degree. They always cherished the White Rose in substance and in sentiment. White roses flourished in their gardens, as in their hearts, even to the last of the family, ‘the bad lord,’ as he was called, and I believe deservedly. I remember Becklea so well; its yew hedges twenty feet high, walls they might be called, they were so thick, with arches cut for the passage of walks, broad and narrow; the well-kept flower-beds edged with box; the quaint yew bushes cut into pagodas and other shapes; the terrace, the vases of stone, and great stone lions at the head of the stone steps in the middle of the

balustrade ; all in keeping with the old, old, mansion, with its many and large windows, built, it was said, in the reign of Henry VI., and nearly covered with ivy. Oh, it was a sin to raze such a fine place to the ground, although there was no one to succeed to it in the male line.

“But you wanted to know about the family history. My father, who was, as you may remember, much attached to the old Earl Oswy, who was the father of the two last Earls (his eldest and youngest sons), regretted the family had been always so cut off in the wars. Three brothers, Thurlestanes, fell in the battle of Marston Moor, fighting with the Royalists—that battle so fatal to the Royal cause! It is said their father regretted less their deaths, as fighting in the good, the Royal cause, than the defeat of the king. He did not survive his sons many years, and it is said his grief for the ‘MURDER,’ as he called it, of Charles I., preying upon his mind, was the chief cause of his death, which happened not long after that of the king. He was succeeded in the property by his fourth son,

Oswy. The fifth son, Edgar, who was the youngest of the family, followed the fortunes of the Prince, afterwards Charles II. All the ready money and much of the proceeds of the property were absorbed in this 'following.' He advanced large sums of money to the King, which were never repaid, and Edgar Thurstane was much impoverished. King Charles, some time after he came to the throne, created him Viscount Thurstane, and subsequently Earl of Beeklea. He had two sons Earls, and I have seen a very bad picture of one of his sons who was killed at the battle of Malplaquet ; another also fell fighting under Marlborough. His son Charles, third Earl, the father of Earl Oswy (our father's friend), married a great heiress, the only child of the last Duke of St. Ives ; and it was to visit her estates in Cornwall that she and Earl Charles made those terrible journeys that I dare say you remember hearing of. Their adventures with the bad roads were like fairy tales. She was a very stately person, and was always spoken of as 'The Lady Gwendoline, Countess of Beeklea.' She preferred Yorkshire to Cornwall, and had

all her family portraits and relics transferred to Becklea Park. I dare say you may remember the long gallery full of portraits and pictures at Becklea, and also the large full-length portraits in court dresses in the reception-rooms. All these pictures came from Pendlebury Castle, her chief estate. The Thurlestanes had a few portraits of Kings and Queens, but of themselves, till this Lady Gwendoline came into the family, they had but one, the portrait of Sir William Thurlestane, Knight, whose three sons fell at Marston Moor. The full-length portraits of herself and Earl Charles were the first of the large Thurlestane family pictures that had been placed on the walls of Becklea; others, as you know, have been added since. But where are they all? I always considered that Ann Lystone, the last of the family, should have had them offered to her."

"Here we are," cried Mr. Dale, jumping up.

"What is the matter?" said Mrs. Dale, quite startled.

"Nothing, my dear, to alarm you; but I do

believe I have got the clue to the history of the old lady. Yet," he said, after a moment's reflection, "that can hardly be. We shall see." And he sat down again to read the letter.

"Ah! 'Ann Lystone, the last of the family'—Yes," he said, and continued the letter:—"—should have had them offered to her if she had been in a position to buy them. Her step-mother died a short time before the last Earl, and Ann, to whom she clung, was quite lost sight of after her death. Earl Charles and the Lady Gwendoline had a large family, but they died off young, with the exception of Earl Oswy; a daughter who was married but died young; Lady Editha, of whom we used to hear so much praise for her great virtues; and the youngest son, Edgar, the great traveller, whom we all knew so well as children.

"Earl Oswy married Caroline Ann, daughter of Owaine Gwent, Squire of Trenant, Cornwall. Theirs was a romantic attachment from childhood, when they met during the few-and-far-between 'pilgrimages' to Pendlebury Castle.

He never swerved from that attachment. He succeeded to the title when he was nineteen, and at twenty-three years of age went to claim his bride, who was a few years his junior. She had no fortune then, but eventually came into a little property, which they sold. I suppose a happier couple in themselves never existed. They had the four sons whom we have known, and two little girls who did not live to grow up. The countess used to say, 'I pray God I may not live to see my lord die.' And she had her wish. He never was the same after her death; they were truly one. The wild ways of their youngest son, Henry, the last Earl, was their grief; from a child he was never to be controlled, and, worse than that, he delighted in low company and pursuits. His mother said, 'Where can he have learned these low manners?' and then would say to him, 'Oh, my son! could'st thou but be a gentleman!' 'No, mother, the life is too dull and formal,' he would answer; and he seemed to avoid the parental roof as much as possible.

"Their son George Owaine, fifth Earl, died

childless. His wife, who was no favourite in the family, died before him, and before the Countess, quite unregretted, I believe, by them all. She had a vile temper, and could keep peace with no one ; she always wanted what was not to be obtained, and encouraged Henry in his wild and spendthrift ways.

“ George was succeeded by this wild brother, Henry, who, as you may remember, ran through the whole properties, even after his debts had been paid more than once. Both his elder brothers, the Rev. Edgar and William, died before their eldest brother. The Hon. and Rev. Edward, of Eddishowe, left only one surviving daughter, and William died unmarried. Ann, Edward’s only surviving daughter, inherited the small fortune of her father, and her stepmother left her some money ; and we heard that her great-uncle Edgar, who was also her godfather, left her some money, but what became of it all, or herself, I never heard.”

“ Here we have it again,” said the rector, turning quickly round.

“ Oh, Alan, how excited you are ; and you startle me so. What have you come to now ? ”

“ Why here’s the ‘ great-uncle and godfather ’ mentioned. My word ! this is a curious case. I must take this letter up to Askham ; it is worth the three shillings and twopence which Jeffrey grudged so much.”

“ But you have not finished the letter ; here is part on the floor.”

“ Thank you, my dear,” he said, and picking the pieces up he continued to read :—

“ The second title was Viscount Thurlestone, but there have only been three of that name—the Earldom so often going to brothers. You are so much younger than I am—six years is a long space in one’s youth—and have been so often absent from home, that perhaps you scarcely remember the Ann Thurlestone I have mentioned. She was a very prominent person, however, in the Becklea family, being a very great favourite with her grandfather and grandmother, and spent as much of her life at Becklea as she did at Eddishowe. Her mother

died when she was quite a child, and her father married his second wife two years after. Never was there a more kind and devoted stepmother than this Mrs. Thurlestane. She had no children of her own, and her whole thoughts were wrapped up in her husband and his two little girls. This of course I have heard from my mother, who remembered them as children when she herself was young. Ann was a great many years older than I was, and her sister Letitia was older still; she died before I was born. My mother said that Letitia was by far the more amiable, and Ann domineered over her as a child, but that Ann grew more kindly as she increased in years, and the death of Letitia after a lingering illness had a great effect upon, her. Her grief was excessive; she and Mrs. Thurlestane, their most devoted, gentle, and judicious stepmother, wept together. However, the natural wilfulness and strength of character of Ann could not be entirely subdued, and was increased, my mother thought, by the active part she had to play in her grandfather's house. She had also a great deal of pride, and the

fashionable manners of the time led to keep it up. She was always addressed and spoken of as ‘The Lady Ann,’ as belonging to a noble family; plain ‘Mistress Ann’ would have been her ordinary name, but this she resented with a toss of the head, imperious, but most graceful. My father admired her excessively; not that she was pretty, for that she was not, but for her grace and dignity — ‘her majesty of deportment,’ as he termed it; and said ‘even if she were a beggar-woman’ it would stand her in good need, though there was not much likelihood of such a catastrophe.”

“Here again,” cried Mr. Dale, “her ‘dignity and majestic manner.’ It is most extraordinary.”

“I shall be glad when you have finished the letter,” said his wife, “for you are really quite beside yourself with it.”

“It is wonderful what a memory Charlotte has! In her I selected the right person for information.”

“You will let me read the letter?”

“Certainly; and I expect you will be almost as excited as you say I am.”

"We will see," said Mrs. Dale, laughing.

He continued to read: "I enter into all these details, as you want to know what I can recollect, but I am afraid I shall miss many little things that might be interesting; the distance of time is great, and no one has broached the subject for so many years. It has taken me some hours to write and recall all this, and it is not consecutively written, as a history should be, but that you will please forgive.

"To continue the Lady Ann's career; she ruled at Becklea, and after her grandmother's death she lived there entirely till the old Earl died. Her great-uncle Edgar idolized her, and brought her the richest presents when he returned from his travels, which were extended to India and China."

"The very things we have seen, I am sure," said Mr. Dale.

"Oh, Alan, it is very provoking to hear all your remarks and not to know to what they refer."

"My love, you shall know all, and you

will meantime please forgive any impetuosity."

"Certainly, most humble sir," said his wife, laughing. "Pray go on with your reading and your running comments."

The letter continued: "It was after her grandfather's death that she went to Bridlington with her stepmother, who had some relations there, and came back, it is supposed, not heart-whole; for, to the great surprise and consternation of every one at Eddishowe, some little time after, she eloped with nobody knew who at the time. A letter was left on her table addressed to her father, saying that 'as he would not consent to her marriage, she had gone off with her lover, and she prayed for his forgiveness and that of her stepmother. She could no longer live without the man she loved!' Their horror and indignation were excessive, as may be imagined. Mr. Thurlestane declared he would not see her again; that she had disgraced herself and them; that his door should be shut against her; that her name should never be mentioned. His wife entreated for her, taking all the blame upon

herself. Why had she not been more vigilant ! The sunshine in the house was gone without the girl's presence ! Had they not known for long, and well, how deeply she was attached to her lover ? They had been perhaps too exacting. Did they not remember in their young days how heart-breaking resistance against strong affection was ? Ann had the strongest affection—— ‘And the most perverse temper,’ interposed Mr. Thurlestane.

“ ‘After that,’ as Mrs. Thurlestane told my mother, ‘I knew it was no use to say any more.’ She succeeded at last in bringing father and daughter together under his roof twice before he died ; and Mrs. Thurlestane was her comforter under many and heavy trials to the end of her life, not many years later. When she died Ann faded completely out of view. I cannot at all tell what became of her, and I never heard of any one trying to trace her, for she had no near relatives left, nor any at all that I ever heard of. Oh, by the bye, I remember hearing that in former years a cousin on her mother's side wished to marry her.

Indeed she had many suitors, for she was very attractive, and the connection was high. And now, my dear Alan, if you want to know any more you will please put questions to me, which I will answer to the best of my ability ; but for narrative I think I have come to an end."

"Well done, Mistress Charlotte," said the Rector, "a right good chatty letter ; but you have not told us all we want ; you will have to answer a good many questions I expect." Then, turning to his wife, he added, "I shall send up to Askham and tell him I will go there this evening with this letter."

"They will want you to go and dine."

"I cannot do that, but will dine here ; and we must dine an hour earlier, as I have a man coming to me after."

"Did Jeffrey tell you about his argument with the postman ?"

"He said the postman had asked too much for the letter."

"That was not all ; he argued with him that it was not fair ; that he had no business to ask

so much ; that he should speak to you about it ; in fact, what right had he to ask anything, for it was not much trouble to bring such a small thing from the post office, where they did not ask anything. The man laughed exceedingly, and told him he had better ask his 'pa.' Jeffrey continued, however. Who told him to ask so much money ? What did he do with it when he got it ? The man told him he got it for the King, and that he was one of His Majesty's servants. ' You one of the king's servants, with such a shabby coat ? Why does he not give you another ? ' said Jeff. ' You can ask your pa,' said the man, ' and if he can get me a better one I shan't say nay,' and he went off laughing and much entertained. Jeffrey came to me and said, ' What a rude man that is.' I said, ' Were you not very rude to put such questions to him ? ' ' I shall ask papa,' he said. So you will be cross-examined on the subject, no doubt."

" This system of questioning and cross-examination upon every occasion becomes quite annoying," said Mr. Dale ; " I can't think what I shall do with him."

“He will be so teased about it at school that he may be cured of it.”

“I doubt it, for it seems quite part of his nature.”

“Well, make him a lawyer.”

“A barrister; that is a good idea, if he will study; he is not fond of his books at present.”



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